The Blue Envelope

by Roy J. Snell

A Mystery Story

Mystery Stories for Girls

By Roy J. Snell

The Blue Envelope

There used to be a theory that girls' books "had to be different." Girls themselves have exploded that theory a thousand times by preferring boys' adventure stories to the weakened-down variety "for girls."

Here is a story that has not been "weakened down." It is as clean and wholesome and worthwhile as you could desire, but it deals with the real interests of the girl of to-day. It's an adventure story through and through, with an enticing tang of mystery, its scene laid in a country of fascinating newness to readers of fiction.

Alaska and Siberia—and two typical American girls among the strange peoples of the earth's white places. Eskimos and Chukches—know who they are?—play a leading part in a tale of girlish pluck amid the trials of Nature in her sternest mood. There is a boy, too, who deserves a line—you will like Phi—who gets letters written in ancient Greek!

And there's a strange charm, three Elk teeth set with jade and an uncut diamond, that leads the adventurous two from an island in Puget Sound across Behring Straits in winter—after the coming of the White Line—the polar ice.

ROY J. SNELL
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Mystery Stories for Girls

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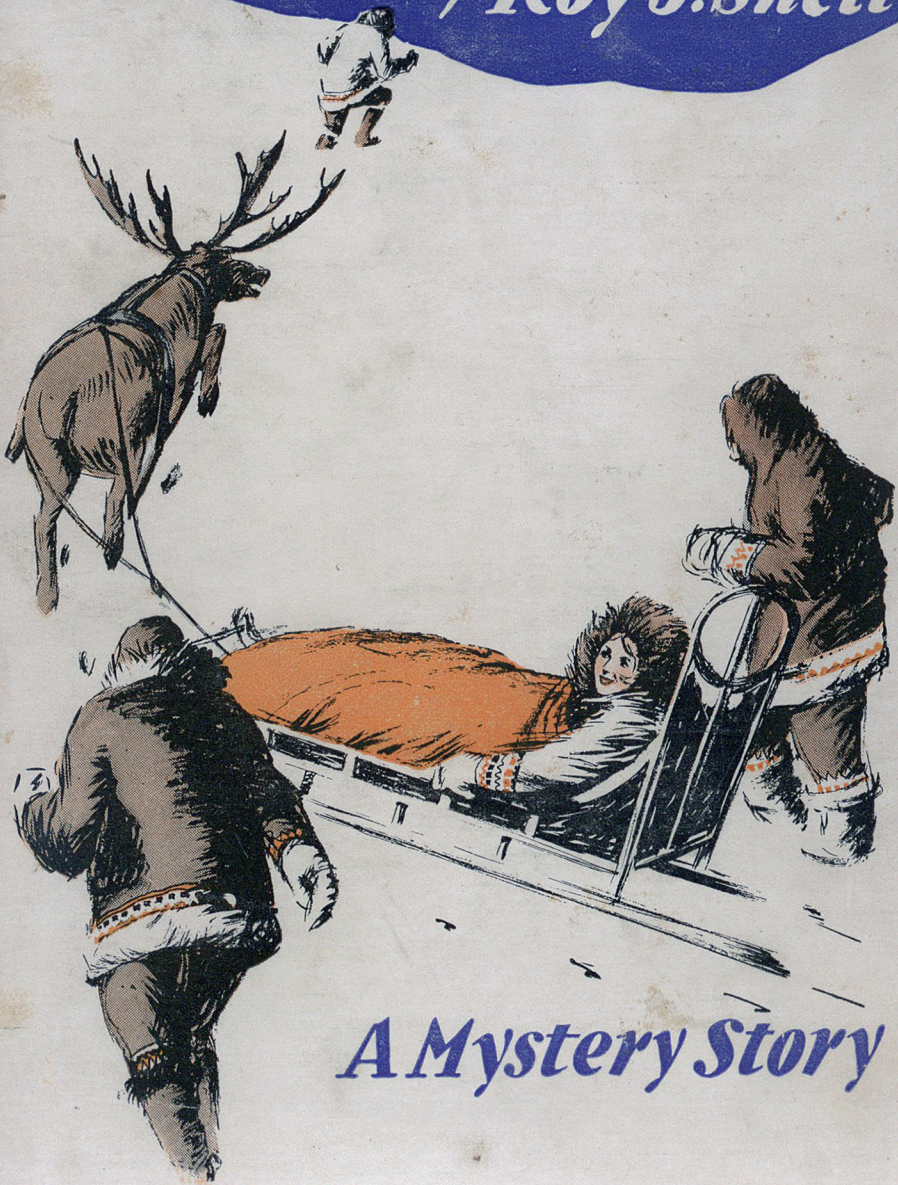

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Adventure Stories for Girls

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By

ROY J. SNELL

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The Blue Envelope

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FOREWORD

When considering the manuscript of "The Blue Envelope" my publishers wrote me asking that I offer some sort of proof that the experiences of Marian and Lucile might really have happened to two girls so situated. My answer ran somewhat as follows:

Alaska, at least the northern part of it, is so far removed from the rest of this old earth that it is almost as distinct from it as is the moon. It's a good stiff nine-day trip to it by water and you sight land only once in all that nine days. For nine months of winter you are quite shut off from the rest of the world. Your mail comes once a month, letters only, over an eighteen-hundred-mile dog trail; two months and a half for letters to come; the same for the reply to go back. Do you wonder, then, that the Alaskan, when going down to Seattle, does

not speak of it as going to Seattle or going down to the States but as "going outside"? Going outside seems to just exactly express it. When you have spent a year in Alaska you feel as if you had truly been inside something for twelve months.

People who live "inside" of Alaska do not live exactly as they might were they in New England. Conventions for the most part disappear. Life is a struggle for existence and a bit of pleasure now and again. If conventions and customs get in the way of these, away with them. And no one in his right senses can blame these people for living that way.

One question we meet, and probably it should be answered. Would two lone girls do and dare the things that Lucile and Marian did? My only answer must be that girls of their age — girls from "outside" at that — have done them.

Helen C——, a sixteen-year-old girl, came to Cape Prince of Wales to keep house for her father, who was superintendent of the reindeer herd at that point. She lived there with her

father and the natives — no white woman about — for two years. During that time her father often went to the herd, which was grazing some forty miles from the Cape, and stayed for a week or two at a time, marking deer or cutting them out to send to market. Helen stayed at the Cape with the natives. At times, in the spring, unattended by her father, she went walrus hunting with the natives in their thirty-foot, sailing skin-boat and stayed out with them for thirty hours at a time, going ten or twelve miles from land and sailing into the very midst of a school of five hundred or more of walrus. This, of course, was not necessary; just a part of the fun a healthy girl has when she lives in an Eskimo village.

Beth N——, a girl of nineteen, came to keep house for her brother, the government teacher on Shishmaref Island — a small, sandy island off the shore of Alaska, some seventy-five miles above Cape Prince of Wales. She had not been with her brother long when a sailing schooner anchored off shore. This schooner had on board

their winter supply of food. Her brother went on board to superintend the unloading. The work had scarcely begun when a sudden storm tore the schooner from her moorings and sent her whirling southward through the straits.

For some ten or twelve days Beth was on that barren, sandy island entirely alone. The natives were, at this time of the year, off fishing up one of the rivers of the mainland. She did not have as much as a match to light a fire. She had no sort of notion as to how or when her brother would return. The fact of the matter was that had not her brother had in his possession a note from the captain asking him to come aboard, and had he not known the penalty for not returning a landsman to his port under such conditions, the unprincipled seaman would have carried him to Seattle, leaving Beth to shift for herself. He reached home on a gasoline schooner some ten days after his departure.

This same Beth, when spring came and she wished to go "outside," engaged a white guide to take her by dog team to Cape Prince of

Wales, where the mail steamer might be caught. It was late in the spring and the ice was soft. They had been traveling for some time on the rough shore ice when they discovered, much to their horror, that their ice pan had broken loose from the shore and was drifting out to sea. They hurried along the edge of it for some distance in the hope of finding a bridge to shore. In this they were disappointed. Beth could not swim. Fortunately the guide could. Leaping into the stinging water he swam from one cake to the next one, leading the dogs. Beth clung to the back of the sled and was thus brought ashore. After wading many swollen torrents, they at last reached Cape Prince of Wales in safety. This sounds very much like fiction but is fact and can be verified.

As to crossing Bering Straits and living with the Chukches in Siberia. I did that very thing myself — went with a crew of Chukches I had never seen, too. I was over there for only three days but might have stayed the summer through in perfect safety. While there I saw a character

known as the French Kid, a white man who had crossed the Straits with the natives late in the year and had wintered there.

Crossing twenty or more miles of floe ice might seem a trifle improbable but here, too, actual performance bears me out. I sent the mail to Thompson, the government teacher on the Little Diomede Island, across 22 miles of floe ice by an Eskimo. This man had made the trip many times before. It is my opinion that what an Eskimo can do, any white man or hearty young woman can do.

Well, there you have it. I don't wish to make my fiction story seem tame, or I might tell you more. As it is I hope I may have convinced you that all the adventures of Lucile and Marian are probable and that the author knows something about the wonderland in which the story is set.

THE AUTHOR.

THE BLUE ENVELOPE

CHAPTER I

A MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE

At the center of a circular bay, forming a perfect horseshoe with a sandy beach at its center and a rocky cliff on either side, two girls were fishing for shrimps. The taller of the two, a curly-haired, red-cheeked girl of eighteen, was rowing. The other, short and rather chubby, now and again lifted a pocket net of wire-screening, and, shaking a score or more of slimy, snapping creatures into one corner of it, gave a dexterous twist and neatly dropped the squirming mass into a tin bucket.

Both girls had the clear, ruddy complexion which comes from clean living and frequent sallies into the out-of-doors. Lucile Tucker, the tall one of curly hair, was by nature a student;

her cousin, Marian Norton, had been born for action and adventure, and was something of an artist as well.

"Look!" exclaimed Lucile suddenly. "What's that out at the entrance of the bay — a bit of drift or a seal?"

"Might be a seal. Watch it bob. It moves, I'd say."

Without further comment Lucile lifted a light rifle from the bow and passed it to her cousin.

Marian stood with one knee braced on the seat and steadied herself for a shot at the object which continued to rise and fall with the low roll of the sea.

Born and reared at Nome on the barren tundra of Alaska, Marian had hunted rabbits, ptarmigan and even caribou and white wolves with her father in her early teens. She was as steady and sure a shot as most boys of her age.

"Boat rocks so," she grumbled. "More waves out there, too. Watch the thing bob!"

"It's gone under!"

"No, there it is!"

"Try it now."

Catching her breath, Marian put her finger to the trigger. For a second the boat was quiet. The brown spot hung on the crest of a wavelet. It was a beautiful target; Marian was sure of her aim.

Just as her finger touched the trigger, a strange thing happened; a something which sent the rifle clattering from nerveless fingers and set the cold perspiration springing to her forehead.

A flash of white had suddenly appeared close to the brown spot, a slim white line against the blue-green of the sea. It was a human arm.

"Who — who — where'd you suppose he came from?" she was at last able to sputter.

"Don't ask me," said Lucile, scanning the sea. Never a mist nor a cloud obscured the vision, yet not a sail nor coil of smoke spoke of near-by craft. "What's more important is, we must help him," she said, seizing the oars and rowing vigorously. Marian, having hung the shrimp trap across the bow, drew a second pair of oars from beneath the seats and joined her in send-

ing the clumsy craft toward the brown spot still bobbing in the water, and which, as they drew nearer, they easily recognized as the head of a man or boy. Lucky for him that he had chanced to throw a white forearm high out of the water just as Marian was prepared unwittingly to send a bullet crashing into his skull.

Realizing that this person, whoever he might be, must have drifted in the water for hours and was doubtless exhausted, the two girls now gave all their strength to the task of rowing. With faces tense and forearms flashing with the oars, they set the boat cutting the waves.

The beach and cliffs back of the bay in which the girls had been fishing were part of the shore line of a small island which on this side faced the open Pacific Ocean and on the other the waters of Puget Sound, off the coast of the state of Washington.

Nestling among a group of giant yellow pines on a ridge well up from the beach, two white tents gleamed. This was the camp of Marian and Lucile. The rock-ribbed and heavily wooded

island belonged to Lucile's father, a fish canner of Anacortes, Washington. There was, so far as they knew, not another person on the island. They had expected a maiden aunt to join them in their outing. She was to have come down from the north in a fishing smack, but up to this time had not arrived. Not that the girls were much concerned about this; they had lived much in the open and rather welcomed the opportunity to be alone in the wilds. It was good preparation for the future. They had pledged themselves to spend the following winter in a far more isolated spot, Cape Prince of Wales, on Bering Straits in Alaska. Lucile, who, though barely eighteen years of age, had finished high school and had spent one year in normal school, was to teach the native school and to superintend the reindeer herd at that point. Marian had lived the greater part of her life in Nome, Alaska, but even from childhood she had shown a marked talent for drawing and painting and had now just finished a two-year course in a Chicago art school. Her drawings of Alaskan

life and the natives had been exhibited and had attracted the attention of a society of ethnology. In fact, so greatly had they been impressed that they had asked Marian to accompany her cousin to Cape Prince of Wales to spend the winter sketching the village life of that vanishing race, the Eskimo.

So this month of camping, hunting and fishing was but a preparatory one to fit them the more perfectly for the more important adventure.

When they reached the mysterious swimmer they were surprised to find him a mere boy, some fourteen years of age.

"What a strange face!" whispered Marian, when they had assisted the dripping stranger into the boat.

They studied him for a moment in silence. His hair and eyes were black, his face brown. He wore a single garment, cleverly pieced together till it seemed one skin, but made of many bird skins, eiderduck, perhaps. This garment left his arms and legs free for swimming.

He said nothing, simply stared at them as if in bewilderment.

"We must get him ashore at once," said Lucile. "He must have swum a long way."

Fifteen minutes later, after tying up the boat, Lucile came upon Marian picking the feathers from a duck they had shot that morning.

"Goin' to make him some broth," she explained, tossing a handful of feathers to the wind. "Must be pretty weak."

Lucile stole a glance at the stranger's face.

"Do you think he's oriental?" she whispered.

"Might be," said Marian. "You don't have to be so careful to whisper though; he doesn't speak our language, it seems, nor any other that I know anything about. Very curious. I tried him out on everything I know."

"Chinese, trying to smuggle in?"

"Maybe."

"He doesn't seem exactly oriental," said Lucile, looking closely at his face.

With his eyes closed as if in sleep, the boy did

not, indeed, seem to resemble very closely any of the many types Lucile had chanced to meet. There was something of the clean brown, the perfect curve of the classic young Italian; something of the smoothness of skin native to the Anglo-Saxon, yet there was, too, the round face, the short nose, the slight angle at the eyes which spoke of the oriental.

"He looks like the Eskimos we have on the streets of Nome," suggested Marian, "only he's too light-complexioned. Couldn't be, anyway."

"Not much likelihood of that," laughed Lucile. "Come two thousand miles in a skin kiak to have his craft wrecked in a calm sea. That couldn't happen."

"Whoever he is, he's a splendid swimmer," commented Marian. "When we reached him he was a mile from any land, with the sea bearing shoreward, and there wasn't a sail or steamer in sight."

The two of them now busied themselves with preparing the evening meal, and for a time forgot their strange, uninvited guest.

When Lucile next looked his way she caught his eyes upon her in a wondering stare. They were at once shifted to the kettle from which there now issued savory odors of boiling fowl.

"He's hungry all right," she smiled.

When the soup was ready to serve they were treated to a slight shock. The bird had been carefully set on a wooden plate to one side. Their guest was being offered only the broth. This he sniffed for a moment, then, placing it carefully on the ground, seized the bird and holding it by the drumsticks began to gnaw at its breast.

Marian stared at him, then smiled. "I don't know as a full meal is good for him, but we can't stop him now."

She set a plate of boiled potatoes before him. The boy paused to stare, then to point a finger at them, and exclaimed something that sounded like: "Uba canok."

"Do you suppose he never ate potatoes?" exclaimed Lucile in surprise. "What sort of boy must he be?"

She broke a potato in half and ate one portion.

At once a broad smile spread over the brown boy's face as he proceeded to add the potatoes to his bill of fare.

"Guess we'll have to start all over getting this meal," smiled Lucile; "our guest has turned into a host."

When at last the strange boy's hunger was assuaged, Lucile brought two woolen blankets from one of the tents and offered them to him. Wrapping himself in these, he sat down by the fire. Soon, with hands crossed over ankles, with face drooped forward, he slept.

"Queer sort of boy!" exclaimed Lucile. "I'd say he was an Indian, if Indians lived that way, but they don't and haven't for some generations. Our little brown boy appears to have walked from out another age."

Night crept down over the island. Long tree shadows spread themselves everywhere, to be at last dissolved into the general darkness. Still the boy sat by the fire, asleep, or feigning sleep.

Not feeling quite at ease with such a stranger in their camp, the girls decided to maintain a watch that night. Marian agreed to stand the first watch until one o'clock, Lucile to finish the night. In the morning they would take their small gasoline launch, which was at this moment hidden around the bend in a small creek, and would carry the boy to the emigration office at Fort Townsend.

They had worked and played hard that day. When Lucile was wakened at one o'clock in the morning, she found herself unspeakably drowsy. A brisk walk to the beach and back, then a dash of cold spring water on her face, roused her.

As she came back to camp she thought she caught a faint and distant sound.

"Like an oarlock creaking," she told herself, "yet who would be out there at this time of night?"

She retraced her steps to the beach to scan the sea that glistened in the moonlight. Not hearing or seeing anything, she concluded that she had been mistaken.

Back at the camp once more, she glanced at the motionless figure seated by the bed of darkening coals. Then, creeping inside the tent, she drew a blanket over her shoulders and sat down, lost at once in deep thought.

As time passed her thoughts turned into dreams and she slept. How long she slept she could not tell. She awoke at last with a start; she felt greatly disturbed. Had she heard a muffled shout? Or was that part of a dream?

Lifting the flap of the tent, she stared at the boy's place by the fire. It was vacant. He was gone!

"Marian," she whispered, shaking her cousin into wakefulness. "Marian! He's gone. The brown boy's gone!"

"Let him go. Who wants him?" Marian murmured sleepily.

At that instant Lucile's keen ears caught the groan of oarlocks.

"But I hear oars," she whispered hoarsely. "They've come for him. Someone has carried him away. I heard him try to cry for help. We

must stop them if we can find a way."

Catching up their rifles they crept stealthily from their tents. Nothing was to be seen save the camp and the forest.

"Think we better try to follow them?" asked Lucile, as she struggled into her shoes, wrapping the laces round and round her ankles for the sake of speed.

"I don't know," said Marian. "They're probably rough men and we're only girls. But we must try to find out what has happened."

In a moment they were creeping stealthily, rifles in hand, toward the beach. As they paused to listen they heard no sound. Either the intruders had rounded the point or had stopped rowing.

Lucile threw the circle of her flashlight out to sea.

"Stop that!" whispered Marian in alarm. "They might shoot."

"Look!" exclaimed Lucile suddenly; "our boat's gone!"

Hastening down the beach, they found it was

all too true; the rowboat had disappeared.

"There weren't any men," exclaimed Marian with sudden conviction. "That boy's taken our boat and rowed away."

"Yes, there were men," insisted Lucile. "I just saw a track in the sand. There it is." She pointed to the beach.

An inspection of the sand showed three sets of footprints leading to the water's edge where a boat had been grounded. These same footprints were about the spot where the stolen boat had been launched.

"There's one queer person among them," said Lucile, after studying the marks closely. "He limps; one step is long and one short, also one shoe is smaller than the other. We'd know that man if we ever saw him."

"Listen!" said Marian suddenly.

Out of the silence that ensued there came the faint pop-pop-pop of a motorboat.

"Behind the point," said Lucile.

"Our motorboat!" whispered Marian.

Without a word Lucile started down the

beach, then up the creek. She was followed close by Marian. Tripped by creeping vines, torn at by underbrush, swished by wet ferns, they in time arrived at the point where the motorboat had been moored.

"Gone!" whispered Lucile.

"We've been deceived and robbed," said Marian mournfully. "Deceived by a boy. His companions left him swimming in the sea so we would find him. As soon as we were asleep, he crept away and towed the schooner down the river, then he flashed a signal and the others came in for him. Probably Indians and half-breeds. They might have left us a rowboat, at least!" she exclaimed in disgust.

With early dawn streaking the sky they sat down to consider. The loss of their motorboat was a serious matter. They had but a scant supply of food, and while their aunt might arrive at any moment, again she might not. If she did not, they had no way of leaving the island.

"We'd better go down the beach," said Ma-

rian. "They might have engine trouble, or something, and be obliged to land, then perhaps we could somehow get our boat."

"It's the only thing we can do," said Lucile. "It's a good thing we had our food supply in our tent, or they would have taken that."

"Speaking of food," said Marian, "I'm hungry. We'd better have our breakfast before we start."

CHAPTER II

A BOLD STROKE REWARDED

Bacon grease was spilled and toast burned in the preparation of breakfast, which was devoured in gulps. Then, with some misgivings but much determination, the two girls hurried away up the beach in the direction from whence had come the pop-popping of their stolen motorboat.

Coming at last to the place where sandy shore was replaced by ragged bowlders, they began making their way through the tangled mass of underbrush, fallen tree-trunks and ferns, across the point of land which cut them off from the next sandy beach.

"This would be splendid if it wasn't so serious," said Marian as they reached the crest of the ridge and prepared to descend. "I always did like rummaging about in an unexplored wilderness. Look at that fallen yellow-

pine; eight feet through if it is an inch; and the ferns are almost tall enough to hide it. And look at those tamaracks down in that gully; they look like black knights. Wouldn't they make a picture?"

"Not just now; come on," exclaimed Lucile, who was weary of battling with the jungle. "Let's get down to the beach and see what's there. There's a long stretch of beach, I think, maybe half a mile. But we must be careful how we make our way down. We might discover something — and we might be discovered first."

To descend a rock-ribbed hill, overgrown with tangled underbrush and buried in decaying tree-trunks, is hardly easier than to ascend it. Both girls were thoroughly out of breath as they finally parted the branches of a fir tree and peered through to where the beach, a yellow ribbon of sand, circled away to the north.

"Not there," whispered Marian.

Lucile gripped her cousin's arm.

"What's that thing two-thirds of the way down, at the water's edge?"

"Don't know. Rock maybe. Anyway, it's not our motorboat."

"No, it's not. It's worth looking into, though. Let's go."

Eagerly they hurried along over the hard-packed sand. The tide was ebbing; the beach was like a floor. Their steps quickened as they approached the object. At last, less than half-conscious of what they were doing, they broke into a run. The thing they had seen was a boat. And a boat to persons in their position was a thing to be prized.

Arrived at its side, they looked it over for a moment in silence.

"It's pretty poor and very heavy, but it will float, I think," was Marian's first comment.

"It's theirs. Thought it wasn't worth risking a stop for."

"But how did they get into our camp? We haven't seen their tracks through the brush."

"Probably took up one small stream and down another."

The boat they had found was a wide, heavy,

flat-bottomed affair, such a craft as is used by fishermen in tending pond-nets.

For a time the two girls stood there undecided. The chances of their recovering the motorboat seemed very poor indeed. To go forward in this heavy boat meant hours of hand-blistering rowing to bring them back to camp. Yet the thought of returning to tell Lucile's brother that they had lost his motorboat was disheartening. To go on seemed dangerous. True, they had rifles but they were, after all, but two girls against three rough men. In spite of all this, they decided in the end to go on. Pushing the boat into the sea they rowed out a few fathoms, then set the sail and bore away before the brisk breeze. The fact that the oar-locks, which were mere wooden pegs, were worn smooth and shiny, told that the boat had not been long unused.

In a short time they found themselves well out from shore in a gently rippling sea, while the point, behind which lay their camp, grew smaller and smaller in the distance.

Presently they cleared a wooded point of land and came in view of a short line of beach. Deep set in a narrow bay, it might have escaped the eye of a less observant person than Marian; so, too, might the white speck that shone from the brown surface of that beach.

"What's that in the center?" she mumbled, reaching for the binoculars by her side. "It's our schooner," she exclaimed after a moment's survey. "Yes, sir, it is! Anyway, it's a motor-boat, and if not ours, whose then?"

"We'd better pull in behind the point, drag our boat up on the rocks and come round by land," whispered Lucile.

"Yes, if we dare, said Marian, overcome for a moment with fear. "If they have seen us and come out to meet us, what then?"

"I hardly think they'd see us without a field glass," said Lucile.

Bending to the oars they set their boat cutting across the wavelets that increased in size with the rising wind.

Ten minutes of hard pulling brought their

boat in behind the point, where it was quieter water and better rowing. This took them to a position quite out of sight of the white spot on the distant beach. If the pirate robbers were truly located in the bay and had not seen the girls they were safe to steal up close.

"Well, suppose they have. If the worst comes to the worst we can escape into the brush," said Marian. "We won't be worse off then than we are now."

"If only we can catch them off guard and get away with our motorboat!" said Lucile fervently.

Two hours of fighting the wilderness brought them at last to the beginning of the short, sandy beach. By peering through the branches they discovered that a clump of young tamaracks, growing close down to the shore, still hid the white spot they had taken for their boat.

Lucile stepped out upon the sand, then bent down to examine a footprint. Quickly she dodged back into the brush.

"They're here, all right," she whispered.

"That's the track of the fellow with the mismate feet."

"Listen!" said Marian.

"Sounds like shouting," said Lucile, after a moment's silence.

"What do you suppose?"

"We'd better move around to a better position."

Cautiously they worked their way through the dense undergrowth. Pausing now and again to listen, they laid their course by the sounds. These sounds resolved themselves into bursts of song and boisterous laughter.

"They're drinking," said Lucile with a shudder.

"If they are, we daren't get near them," whispered Marian.

Closer and closer they crept until at last they expected at any moment to come into view of the camp.

"It's no use," said Lucile at last, shrinking back into the brush. "I can't go on. They're drunk, and all drunken men are dangerous. It

is no use risking too much for a motorboat."

Wearily then they made their way back through the brush. So sore were their muscles by this time that every step gave them pain. Missing their way, they came out upon the beach a hundred yards from their boat. There, behind the sheltering boughs of a dwarf fir tree they threw themselves upon the bed of pine needles to rest.

"Look!" exclaimed Lucile suddenly. "What's that out there?"

"Our motorboat," Marian gasped. "It's broken loose and is going out with the tide. They must not have seen it. Quick! Our rowboat! We may beat them yet!"

With wildly beating hearts they raced up the beach. Having reached the heavy rowboat they pushed it off. Wading knee-deep in the sea to give the boat a good start, they at last leaped to their seats and grasped the oars, and with strong, deft, strokes set her cutting the water. Length by length they lessened the distance between them and the drifting prize.

Now they were two hundred yards away, now one hundred, now fifty, now —

There came a shout from the shore. With a quick glance over her shoulder Lucile took in the situation.

"We'll make it," she breathed. "Pull hard. They're a long way off."

Moments seemed hours as they strained at the oars, but at last they bumped the side of the motorboat and the next second found themselves on board.

Marian clung to the tiller of the rowboat while she swung round to the wheel. Lucile gave the motor a turn and to their great joy the noble little engine responded with a pop-pop-pop.

There came another shout, a hopeless one, from the robbers.

"We beat them. We —" Marian broke short off. "Look, Lucile. Look over there!"

To the right of them, bobbing up and down as they had seen it once before, was the head of the strange brown boy.

"Do you suppose they did kidnap him?" said Lucile.

"We can go by where he is," said Marian. "They can't catch us now."

The boat swung round and soon they were beside the swimmer.

"Look," cried Lucile, "his feet are tied tightly together! He mustn't have been their friend. They carried him off. They had him bound and he rolled down to the beach to escape by swimming."

They dragged the boy on board. Then they were away again, full speed once more.

"Well, that's done," sighed Lucile, as she settled herself at the wheel. "They've our rowboat and we have theirs. I hope that after this they will let us alone."

"The person who is bothering me," said Marian with a frown, "is this little brown visitor of ours. Who is he? Where did he come from? Where does he want to go? Where should he go? What are we going to do with him?"

"That," said Lucile, wrinkling her brow, "is

more than I know. Neither do I know how those men came to steal him. They probably kidnapped him from his home, wherever that is, and have been making a slave of him."

"I think you are right," said Marian, "and probably the problem will solve itself in time."

The problem did solve itself, at least part of it, that very night; the remaining part of the problem was to be solved months later under conditions so strange that, had the girls been able to vision them lying away, like a mirage on the horizon of the future, they would have been tempted to change their plans for the year just before them.

The first question, what was to be done with the little brown stranger, was solved that night. He solved it himself. The girls had decided upon maintaining a watch. Lucile was on the second watch at something like one o'clock in the morning, when she saw the brown boy stirring in his place by the fire. She was seated far back in the shadowy depths of the tent with a rifle across her knee. He could not see her,

though she could catch his every move in the moonlight.

With a gliding motion he carried his two blankets to a shadowy spot and there folded each one, laying one upon the other. He then proceeded to gather up certain articles about camp. A small ax, a knife, fishing tackle and matches were hurriedly thrown upon the blanket. Now and again, like some wild thing of the forest, he paused to cock his head to one side and listen.

"Should I call Marian and stop him?" Lucile asked herself. The question was left all undecided. The little drama being enacted was too fascinating to suffer interruption. It was like something that had happened in her earlier childhood when she had lain in a garret watching a mother mouse carry away her five children, Lucile thereby suffering a loss of six cents, for she would have been paid a cent apiece for the capture of those mice.

The brown boy next approached the kitchen tent. He entered, to appear a moment later with a modest armload of provisions.

When these had been placed on the blanket, with marvelous speed and skill he converted the whole into a convenient pack.

"Shall I stop him?" Lucile asked herself.

She was about to call out from her dark corner, when a peculiar action of the boy arrested her. He appeared to be taking some small object from beneath the collar of his strange suit of bird-skin.

"I wonder what it is?" she puzzled.

Whatever it was, he walked with it to a broad, flat rock, and placing it in the very center, turned and left it there. The object gave forth such a startling lustre in the moonlight, and Lucile was so intent upon watching it, she did not realize that the brown boy had thrown his pack over his shoulder and disappeared into the woods.

When she did discover it, she merely shrugged her shoulders and smiled:

"Probably for the best," she told herself. "He's taken nothing of any great value and nothing we will need badly, and, unless I miss

my guess, he'll be quite able to take care of himself in a wood that is full of game and berries and where there are fish for throwing in the hook. Let's see what he left, though."

Cautiously she crept out into the moonlight.

A low exclamation escaped her lips as her hand closed upon the glistening object. As she examined it closely, she found it to be three teeth, apparently elk teeth. They were held together with a plain leather thong, but set in the center of each was a ring of blue jade and in the center of each of two of the rings was a large pearl. The center of the third was beyond doubt a crudely cut diamond of about two carats weight. Lucile turned it over and over in her palm.

"Why, the poor fellow," she murmured. "He's given us a king's ransom for a few trinkets and a little food! And I thought he was stealing," she reproached herself.

Her first instinct was to attempt to call him back. "But," she told herself, "my voice would not carry far in that dense woods. Besides, he

wouldn't understand me and would only be frightened."

Returning to her tent, she hid the strange bit of jewelry, which, to its wearer, had doubtless been a charm, then waited the end of her watch to tell of the strange occurrence to her cousin. When Marian awoke Lucile told her story.

Together, in that early hour of the morning, they exclaimed over the rare treasure that had come into their hands; together agreed that, somehow, it must be returned to the original owner, and at last, after much talk on the subject, agreed that, on the whole, the departure of the brown boy reduced the possible complications to a considerable degree.

Next day their aunt arrived and with her a school-teacher friend. With their forces increased by two the girls were not afraid to maintain their camp. In fear of the return of the robbers they established a nightly watch. That this fear was not unfounded was proved by the events of the third night of vigil. It was again in the early morning when Marian was on

guard, that heavy footsteps could be heard in the underbrush about the camp.

She had left the tent flap open, commanding a view of the shore line. The gasoline schooner lay high and dry on the sandy beach, within her line of vision. This she watched carefully. A man who dared touch that boat was in danger of his life, for a rifle lay across her knees and, with the native hardihood of an Alaskan, she would not fail to shoot quick and sure.

But the man did not approach the boat. He merely prowled about the tents as if seeking information. Marian caught one glimpse of him over the cooking tent. Though he was gone in an instant, she recognized him as one of the men who had stolen their motorboat.

After a time his footsteps sounded far down the beach. Nothing more was heard from him.

"Guess he was looking for the brown boy, but became satisfied that he was not here," explained Marian next morning.

"Perhaps they'll let us alone after this," said Lucile.

This prophecy came to pass. After a few nights the vigil was dropped and the remaining days on the island were given over to the pleasures of camp life.

The discovery of a freshly abandoned fire on the beach some miles from camp proved that Lucile's belief that the brown boy could take care of himself was well founded. His footprints were all about in the sand. Feathers of a wild duck and the heads of three good-sized fishes showed that he had fared well.

"We'll meet him again somewhere, I am sure," said Lucile with conviction, "and until we do, I shall carry his little present as a sort of talisman."

The weeks passed all too quickly. One day, with many regrets, they packed their camp-kit in the motorboat and went pop-popping to Lucile's home.

Three weeks later saw them aboard the steamship *Torentia* bound for Cape Prince of Wales by way of Nome. They were entering upon a new and adventure-filled life. This journey,

though they little guessed it, brought them some two thousand miles nearer the spot where, once again under the strangest of circumstances, they were to meet the brown boy who had come swimming to them from the ocean.

CHAPTER III

THE MYSTERIOUS PHI BETA KI

It was some months later that Marian stood looking down from a snow-clad hill. From where she stood, brushes and palette in hand, she could see the broad stretch of snow-covered beach, and beyond that the unbroken stretch of drifting ice which chained the restless Arctic Sea at Cape Prince of Wales, Alaska. She gloried in all the wealth of light and shadow which lay like a changing panorama before her. She thrilled at the thought of the mighty forces that shifted the massive ice-floes as they drifted from nowhere to nowhere. Now for the thousandth time she stood spellbound before it.

As she gazed out to sea, her mind went back over the year and a half that had passed since she and Lucile had spent that eventful month on Mutineer's Island. But her thoughts were

cut short. Throwing up her hands in wild glee, she exclaimed:

"The mail! The mail!"

The coming of the mail carrier was, indeed, a great event in this out-of-the-way spot. Once a month he came whirling around the point, behind a swift-footed dog-team. He came unheralded. Conditions of snow and storm governed his time of travel, yet come he always did.

No throng greeted his coming. No eager crowd hovered about the latticed window waiting for the mail to be "made up." If a dozen letters were in the sack, that was what might be expected.

But these letters had come eighteen hundred miles by dog-team. Precious messages they were. Tomorrow, perhaps, a bearded miner would drop in from Tin City, which was a city only in name. This lone miner would claim one of the letters. Two, perhaps, would go to another miner on Saw Tooth Mountain. Next week, an Eskimo happening down from Shishmaref Island, seventy-five miles north, would

take three letters to Ben Norton and his sister, the government teachers for the Eskimos. Two would go in a pigeon-hole, for Thompson, the teacher on Little Diomede Island, twenty-two miles across the drifting ice. Later a native would be paid ten sacks of flour for attempting to cross that floe and deliver the contents of that box. There might be a scrawled note for some Eskimo, a stray letter or two, and the rest would be for Marian. At the present moment, she was the only white person at Cape Prince of Wales, a little town of three hundred and fifty Eskimos.

"Pretty light this time," smiled the grizzled mail carrier as he reached the cabin at the top of the hill; "mebby ten letters."

"Uncle Sam takes good care of his people," smiled Marian, "the teachers of his native children and the miners who search for his hidden treasures."

"I'll say he does! Must have cost all of ten dollars apiece to deliver them letters," chuckled the carrier. "And the people that mailed 'em stuck on a measly red two-cent stamp. I git

fifty dollars for bringin' 'em the last sixty miles."

"And it's worth it, too."

"You're just right. Pretty tough trail. Pretty tough! Say!" he exclaimed, suddenly remembering a bit of gossip, "did ye hear about Tootsie Silock?"

"No." Marian was busy with the mail.

"Jist gossip, I reckon, but they say she's left her Eskimo husband —"

Marian did not answer. Gossip did not interest her. Besides, she had found a letter that did interest her even more than those addressed to her. A very careful penman had drawn the Greek letters, Phi Beta Ki, on the outside of an envelope, and beneath it had written, "Cape Prince of Wales, Alaska."

"Wha —"

She was on the point of sharing the mystery with the carrier, but checked herself. Just some new gossip for him, was her mental comment.

"Here's the sack," she said, noting that he had finished drinking the coffee she had pre-

pared for him. "I hope there'll be more mail next time. Letters mean so much to these people up at the top of the world. Spring thaw'll be here pretty soon, then they can't get mail for two or three months."

"That's right; it's fierce," said the carrier, taking the sack and turning toward the door.

"Phi Beta Ki," Marian pronounced the letters softly to herself as the door closed. "Now who could that be?"

She was still puzzling over the mysterious letter when, after a hasty luncheon, she again took up her palette and brushes and wound her way around the hill to a point where stood a cabinet, ten feet square and made of fiber-board.

She returned to her painting. She was doing a mass of ice that was piling some two hundred yards out to sea. The work was absorbing, yet, eager as she was to work, her mind went back to that letter in the pigeon-hole up in the cabin.

She was deep in the mystery of it when a voice startled her. It came from back of the cabinet.

"I say," the voice sang cheerily, "have you any letters in your little P. O. on the hill?"

The voice thrilled her. It was new and sounded young.

"Yes," she said, throwing open the back of the cabinet and standing up, "we have, quite — quite a variety."

The visitor *was* young, not more than twenty, she thought.

"What color?" she said teasingly, as she stepped from her cabinet.

"Blue," he said seriously.

"Blue?" She started. The mysterious letter was blue; the only blue one she had seen for months.

"What name?"

"Well, you see," the young man flushed, "not — not any real name; just the Greek letters, Phi Beta Ki."

He stepped into the cabinet and, with deft fingers, drew with charcoal the characters.

"Like that," he smiled.

"Yes," she smiled back, "there is one."

"Grand!" he exclaimed. "Let's get it at once, shall we?"

They hastened up the hill. Marian wondered at herself, as she handed out the letter; wondered that she did not question him further to make sure he was really the rightful owner. But there was something free and frank about his bearing. It disarmed suspicion.

After he had read the letter, she thought she caught a look of disappointment on his face. If she did, it quickly vanished.

While she was dispensing the accustomed hospitality of the Northland, a steaming plate of "mulligan" and a cup of coffee, she felt his eyes resting upon her many times.

When at last he had finished eating, he turned and spoke hesitatingly:

"I — I'd like to ask a favor of you."

"All right."

"If another letter like that comes to me here, you keep it for me, will you?"

"Why, yes, only I won't be here much longer. I'm going to Nome after the break-up."

"I'm going north. I'll be back before then. But if I'm not, you keep it, will you?" There was a tense eagerness about him that stirred her strongly.

"Why, yes — I — I — guess so. But what shall I do if you don't get back before I leave?"

"Take it with you. Leave word where I can find you and take it."

"You see," he half-apologized, after a moment's thought, "these northern P. O.'s change hands so much, so many people handle the mail, that I — I'm afraid I might lose one of these letters, and — and — they're mighty important; at least, one of them is going to be. Will you do it? I — I think I'd trust you — though I don't just know why."

"Yes," Marian said slowly, "I'll do that."

Three minutes later she saw him skillfully disentangling his dogs and sending them on their way.

"One of those college boys," she whispered to herself. "They come North expecting to find gold shining in the sand of the beach. I've seen

so many come up here as he is, happy and hopeful, and in three or four years I've seen them go 'outside,' old beyond their years, half-blind with snow-blindness, or worse; broken in body and spirit. I only hope it does not happen to him. But what's all the mystery, I'd like to know?"

She gave a sudden start. For the first time she realized that he had not given her his name.

"And I promised to personally conduct that mysterious mail of his!" she exclaimed under her breath.

CHAPTER IV

FOR HE IS A WHITE MAN'S DOG

Two months had elapsed since the mysterious college boy had passed on north with his dog-team.

Many things could have happened to him in those months. As Marian sat looking away at the vast expanse of drifting ice which had been restless in its movements of late, telling of the coming of the spring break-up, she wondered what had happened to the frank-eyed, friendly boy. He had not returned. Had a blizzard caught him and snatched his life away? The rivers were overflowing their banks now, though thick and rotten ice was still beneath the milky water. Had he completed his mission north, and was he now struggling to make his way southward? Or was he securely housed in some out-of-the-way cabin, waiting for open water and a schooner?

A letter had come, a letter in a blue envelope, and addressed as the other to Phi Beta Ki. That was after Lucile's return. Lucile had been away to the Nome market with her deer herd when the first letter had come, but had now been home for a month. The two of them had laughed and wondered about that letter. They had put it in the pigeon-hole, and there it now was. But Marian had not forgotten her promise to take it with her in case the boy did not return before she left the Cape.

Now, as she watched the restless ocean, she realized that it would not be many days before it would break its bonds. The ice would then float away to points unknown. Little gasoline schooners would go flitting here and there like sea-gulls, and then would come the hoarse voice of the *Corwin,* mail steamer for Arctic. She would take that steamer to Nome. Would the boy be back by then, or would she carry the mysterious letter with her? For a long time Marian gave herself up to speculation.

As she sat dreaming of these things, she

started suddenly Something had touched her foot.

"Oh;" she exclaimed, then laughed.

The most forlorn-looking dog she had ever seen had touched her foot with his nose. His hair was ragged and matted. His bones protruded at every possible point. His mouth was set awry, one side hanging half-open.

"So it's you," she said; "you're looking worse than common."

The dog opened his mouth, allowing his long tongue to loll out.

"I suppose that means you're hungry. Well, for once you are in luck. The natives caught a hundred or more salmon through the ice. I have some of them. Fish, Old Top, fish! What say?"

The dog stood on his hind legs and barked for joy. He read the sign in her eyes if he did not understand her lip-message.

In another moment he was gulping down a fat, four-pound salmon, while Marian eyed him, a curious questioning look on her face.

"Now," she said, as the dog finished, "the question is what are we going to do with you? You're an old dog. You're no good in a team. Too old. Bad feet. No, sir, you can't be any good, or you wouldn't be back here in five days. We gave you to Tommy Illayok to lead his team. You were a leader in your day all right, and you'd lead 'em yet if you could, poor old soul!"

There was a catch in her voice. To her dogs were next to humans. In the North they were necessary servants as well as friends.

"The thing that makes it hard to turn you out," she went on huskily, "is the fact that you're a white man's dog. Yes, sir! a white man's dog. And that means an awful lot; means you'd stick till death to any white person who'd feed you and call you friend. Mr. Jack London has written a book about a white man's dog that turned wild and joined a wolf-pack. It's a wonderful book, but I don't believe it. A white man's dog wants a white man for a friend, and if he loses one he'll keep traveling until he finds another. That's the way a white

man's dog is, and that's why you come back to us, poor old dear." She stooped and patted the shaggy head.

"I'll tell you what," she murmured, after a moment's reflection. "If the fish keep running, if the wild ducks come north, or the walrus come barking in from Bering Sea, then you can stay with us and get sleek and fat. You can sleep by our door in the hallway every night, and if anyone comes prowling around, you can ask them what they want. How's zat?"

The dog howled his approval.

Marian smiled, and turning went into the cabin. The dog did not belong to them. He was an old and decrepit leader, deserted by a faithless master. He had adopted their cabin as his home. When food had become scarce, they had been forced to give him to an Eskimo traveling up the coast. Now, in five days he was back again. Marian was not sure that Lucile would approve of the arrangement she had made with the dog, but when her heart prompted her, she could only follow its promptings.

She had hardly entered the cabin than she heard a growl from the dog, followed by the voice of a stranger.

"Down, Rover!" she shouted, as she sprang to the door.

The man who stood before her was badly dressed and unshaven. His eyes bore a shifty gleam.

"Get out, you cur!" He kicked at the dog with his heavy boot.

Marian's eyes flashed, but she said nothing.

"This the post office?" The man attempted a smile.

"Yes, sir."

"'S there a letter here for me?"

"I don't know," she smiled. "Won't you come in?"

The man came inside.

"Now," she said, "I'll see. What is your name?"

"Ben —" he hesitated. 'Oh — that don't matter. Won't be addressed to my name. Addressed like that."

He drew from his pocket a closely-folded, dirt-begrimed envelope.

Marian's heart stopped beating. The envelope was blue — yes, the very shade of blue of that other in the pigeon-hole. And it was addressed: Phi Beta Ki, Nome, Alaska.

"Is there a letter here like that?" the man demanded, squinting at her through blood-shot eyes.

It was a tense moment. What should she say? She loathed the man; feared him, as well. Yet he had asked for the letter and had offered better proof than the mysterious college boy had. What should she say?

"Yes," she said, and then hesitated. Her heart beat violently. His searching eyes were upon her. "Yes, there was one. It came two months ago. A young man called for it and took it away."

"You — you gave it to him!"

The man lifted a hand as if to strike Marian. She did not flinch.

There came a growl from the door. Looking

quickly, Marian caught the questioning gleam in the old leader's eye.

The man's arm fell.

"Yes," she said stoutly, "I gave it to him. Why should I not? He offered no real proof that he was the right person, it is true — "

"Then why — "

"But neither have you," Marian hurried on. "You might have picked that envelope up in the street, or taken it from a wastepaper basket. How do I know? "

"What — what sort of a boy was it? " the man asked more steadily.

"A good-looking, strapping young fellow, with blue eyes and an honest face."

"That's him! That's him! " the man almost raved. "Honest-lookin', yes, honest-lookin'. They ain't all honest that looks that way."

Again came the growl from the door.

Marian's eyes glanced uneasily toward the pigeon-hole where the latest blue envelope rested. She caught an easy breath. A large white legal envelope quite hid the blue one.

"Well, if another one comes, remember it's mine! Mine!" growled the man, as he went stamping out of the room.

"Old Rover," Marian said, taking the dog's head between her hands. "I'm glad you're here. When there are such men as that about, we need you."

And yet, as she spoke her heart was full of misgivings. What if this man's looks belied his nature? What if he were honest? And what if her good-looking college boy was a rascal? There in the pigeon-hole was the blue envelope. What was her duty?

Pulling on her calico parka, she went for a stroll on the beach. The cool, damp air of Arctic twilight by the sea was balm to her troubled brain. She came back to the cabin with a deep-seated conviction that she was right.

She was not given many days to decide whether she should take the letter with her or leave it. A sudden gale from the south sent the ice-floes rushing through the Straits. They has-

tened away to seas unknown, not to return for months. The little mail steamer came hooting its way around the Point. It brought a letter of the utmost importance to Marian.

While in Nome the summer before she had made some hasty sketches of the Chukches, natives of the Arctic coast of Siberia, while they camped on the beach there on a trading voyage in a thirty-foot skin-boat. These sketches had come to the notice of the ethnological society. They now wrote to her, asking that she spend a summer on the Arctic coast of Siberia, making sketches of these natives, who so like the Eskimos are yet so unlike them in many ways. The pay, they assured her, would be ample; in fact, the figures fairly staggered her. Should she complete this task in safety and to the satisfaction of the society, she would then be prepared to pay her way through a three years' course in the best art school of America. This had long been a cherished dream. Marian's eyes shone with happiness.

When she had read the letter through, she went for a five-mile walk down the beach.

Upon returning she burst in on her companion.

"Lucile," she exclaimed, "how would you like to spend the summer in Siberia?"

"Fine! Salt mine, I suppose," laughed Lucile. "But I thought all political prisoners had been released by the new Russian government?"

"I'm not joking," said Marian.

"Explain then."

Marian did explain. At the end of her explanation Lucile agreed to go as Marian's traveling companion and tent-keeper. In two weeks her school work would be finished. It would be a strange, a delightful summer. Their enthusiasm grew as they talked about it. Long after they should have been asleep they were still making plans for this, their most wonderful adventure.

"But how'll we go over?" exclaimed Lucile suddenly.

"Gasoline schooner, I suppose."

"I'd hate to trust any men I know who run those crafts," said Marian thoughtfully.

Lucile considered a moment.

"Native skin-boat, then."

"That would be rather thrilling — to cross from the new world into the old in a skin-boat."

"And safe enough too," said Marian. "Did you ever hear of a native boat being lost at sea?"

"One. But that one turned up at King's Island, a hundred and fifty miles off its course."

"I guess we could risk it."

"All right, let's go."

Marian sprang to her feet, threw back the blankets to her couch, and fifteen minutes later was dreaming of a tossing skin-boat on a wild sea of walrus monsters and huge white bears.

Her wild dreams did not come true. When the time came to cross the thirty-five miles of water which separates the Old World from the New, they sailed and paddled over a sea as placid as a mill-pond. Here a brown seal bobbed

his head out of the water; here a spectacled eiderduck rode up and down on the tiny waves, and here a great mass of tubular seaweed drifted by to remind them that they were really on the bosom of the briny ocean.

Only one incident of the voyage caused them a feeling of vague unrest. A fog had settled down over the sea. They were drifting and paddling slowly forward, when the faint scream of a siren struck their ears. It came nearer and nearer.

"A gasoline schooner," said Marian.

The natives began shouting to avert a possible collision.

Presently the schooner appeared, a dark bulk in the fog. It took shape. Men were seen on the deck. It came in close by. The waves from it reached the skin-boat.

They were passing with a salute, when a strange thing happened. Rover, the old dog-leader, who had been riding in the bow standing well forward, as if taking the place of a painted figurehead, suddenly began to bark furiously.

At the same time, Marian caught sight of a bearded face framed in a porthole.

Involuntarily she shrank back out of sight. The next instant the schooner had faded away into the fog. The dog ceased barking.

"What was it?" asked Lucile anxiously.

"Only a face."

"Who?"

"The man who wanted the blue envelope; Rover recognized him first."

'You don't suppose he knew, and is following?"

"How could he know?"

"But what is he going to Siberia for?"

"Perhaps to trade. They do that a great deal. Let's not talk of it." Marian shivered.

The incident was soon forgotten. They were nearing the Siberian shore which was to be their summer home. A million nesting birds came skimming out over the sea, singing their merry song as if to greet them. They would soon be living in a tent in the midst of a city of tents. They would be studying a people whose

lives are as little known as were those of the natives in the heart of Africa before the days of Livingstone.

As she thought of these things Marian's cheeks flushed with excitement.

"What new thrill will come to us here?" her lips whispered.

CHAPTER V

CAST ADRIFT

There was a shallow space beneath a tray of color-tubes in the very bottom of Marian's paint-box. There, on leaving Cape Prince of Wales, she had stowed the blue envelope addressed to Phi Beta Ki. She had not done this without misgivings. Disturbing thoughts had come to her. Was it the right thing to do? Was it safe? The latter question had come to her with great force when she saw the grizzled miner's face framed in the porthole of that schooner.

But from the day they landed at Whaling, on the mainland of Siberia, all thoughts of the letter and the two claimants for its possession were completely crowded from her mind.

Never in all her adventurous life had Marian experienced anything quite so thrilling as this life with the Chukches of the Arctic coast of Siberia.

In Alaska the natives had had missionaries and teachers among them for thirty years. They had been Americanized and, in a sense, Christianized. The development of large mining centers to which they journeyed every summer to beg and barter had tended to rob them of the romantic wildness of their existence. But here, here where no missionaries had been allowed nor teachers been sent, where gold gleamed still ungathered in the beds of the rivers, here the natives still dwelt in their dome-like houses of poles and skins. Here they fared boldly forth in search of the dangerous walrus and white bear and the monstrous whale. Here they made strange fire to the spirits of the monsters they had slaughtered, and spoke in grave tones of the great spirit that had come down from the moon in the form of a raven with a beak of old ivory.

It is little wonder that Marian forgot all thought of fear amid such surroundings, as she worked industriously at the sketches which were to furnish her with three years of wonderful study under great masters.

But one day, after six weeks of veritable dream life, as she lifted the tray to her paint-box her eyes fell on that blue envelope. Instantly a flood of remembrance rushed through her mind; the frank-faced college boy, the angry miner, old Rover, the dog, who, sleek and fat on whale meat, lay curled up beside her, then again the grizzled face of the miner framed in a port-hole; all these passed before her mind's vision and left her chilled.

Her hand trembled. She could not control her brush. The sketch of two native women in deerskin unionsuits, their brown shoulders bared, working at the task of splitting walrus skins, went unfinished while she took a long walk down the beach.

That very evening she had news that caused her blood to chill again. A native had come from East Cape, the next village to the south. He had seen a white man there, a full-bearded man of middle age. He had said that he intended coming to Whaling in a few days. He had posed among the natives as a spirit-doctor

and had, according to reports, worked many wonderful cures by his incantations. Three whales had come into the hands of the East Cape hunters. This was an excellent catch and had been taken as a good omen; the bearded stranger was doubtless highly favored by the spirits of dead whales.

"I wish our skin-boat would come for us," said Lucile suddenly, as they talked of it in the privacy of their tent.

"But it won't, not for three weeks yet. That was the agreement."

"I know."

"And we haven't a wireless to call them with. Besides, my sketches are not nearly complete."

"I know," said Lucile, her chin in her hands. "But, all the same, that man makes me afraid."

"Well, I'll hurry my sketches, but that won't bring the boat any sooner."

Had Marian known the time she would have for sketching, she might not have done them so rapidly. As it was, she worked the whole long eighteen-hour days through.

In the meantime, chill winds began sweeping down from the north. Still the bearded white man did not come to Whaling, but every day brought fresh reports of the good fortune of the people of East Cape. They had captured a fourth whale, then a fifth. Their food for the winter was secured. Whale meat was excellent food. They would have an abundance of whalebone to trade for flour, sugar and tea.

But if the East Capers were favored, the men of Whaling were not. One lone whale, and that a small one, was their total take. Witch-doctors began declaring that the presence of strange, white-faced women in their midst was displeasing to the spirits of dead whales. The making of the images of the people on canvas was also sure to bring disaster.

As reports of this dissatisfaction came to the ears of the girls, they began straining their eyes for a square sail on the horizon. Still their boat did not come.

Then came the crowning disaster of the year. The walrus herd, on which the natives based

their last hope, passed south along the coast of Alaska instead of Siberia. Their caches were left empty. Only the winter's supply of white bear and seal could save them from starvation.

"Dezra! Dezra!" (It is enough!) the natives whispered among themselves.

The day after the return of the walrus canoes Marian and Lucile went for a long walk down the beach.

Upon rounding a point in returning Marian suddenly gave a gasp. "Look, Lucile! It's gone — our tent!"

"Gone!" exclaimed Lucile unbelievingly.

"I wonder what — "

"Look, Marian; the whole village!"

"Let's run."

"Where to? We'd starve in two days, or freeze. Come on. They won't hurt us."

With anxious hearts and trembling footsteps they approached the solid line of fur-clad figures which stretched along the southern outskirts of the village.

As they came close they heard one word re-

peated over and over: "Dezra! Dezra!" (Enough! Enough!)

And as the natives almost chanted this single word, they pointed to a sled on which the girls' belongings had been neatly packed. To the sled three dogs were hitched, two young wolf-hounds with Rover as leader.

"They want us to go," whispered Lucile.

"Yes, and where shall we go?"

"East Cape is the only place."

"And that miner?"

"It may not be he."

Three times Marian tried to press her way through the line. Each time the line grew more dense at the point she approached. Not a hand was laid upon her; she could not go through, that was all. The situation thrilled as much as it troubled her. Here was a people kind at heart but superstitious. They believed that their very existence depended upon getting these two strangers from their midst. What was there to do but go?

They went, and all through the night they

assisted the little dog-team to drag the heavy load over the first thin snow of autumn. Over and over again Marian blessed the day she had been kind to old Rover because he was a white man's dog, for he was the pluckiest puller of them all.

Just as dawn streaked the east they came in sight of what appeared to be a rude shack built of boards. As they came closer they could see that some of the boards had been painted and some had not. Some were painted halfway across, and some only in patches of a foot or two. They had been hastily thrown together. The whole effect, viewed at a distance, resembled nothing so much as a crazy-quilt.

"Must have been built from the wreckage of a house," said Lucile.

"Yes, or a boat."

"A boat? Yes, look; there it is out there, quite a large one. It's stranded on the sandbar and half broken up."

The girls paused in consternation. It seemed they were hedged in on all sides by perils. To

go back was impossible. To go forward was to throw themselves upon the mercies of a gang of rough seamen. To pass around the cabin was only to face the bearded stranger, who, they had reason to believe, was none other than the man who had demanded the blue envelope.

A few minutes' debate brought them to a decision. They would go straight on to the cabin.

"Mush, Rover! Mush!" Marian threw her tired shoulders into the improvised harness, and once more they moved slowly forward.

It was with wildly beating hearts that they eventually rounded the corner of the cabin and came to a stand by the door. At once an exclamation escaped their lips:

"Empty! Deserted!"

And so it proved. Snow that had fallen two days before lay piled within the half-open doorway. No sign of occupation was to be found within save a great rusty galley range, two rickety chairs, an improvised table, two rusty kettles and a huge frying-pan.

"They have given the ship up as a total loss,

and have left in dories or skin-boats," said Marian.

"Yes," agreed Lucile. "Wanted to get across the Straits before the coming of the White Line."

The "coming of the White Line." Marian started. She knew what that meant far better than Lucile did. She had lived in Alaska longer, had seen it oftener. Now she thought what it would mean to them if it came before the skin-boat came for them. And that skin-boat? What would happen when it came to Whaling? Would the Chukches tell them in which direction they had gone? And if they did, would the Eskimo boatmen set their sail and go directly to East Cape? If they did, would they miss this diminutive cabin standing back as it did from the shore, and seeming but a part of the sandbar?

"We'll put up a white flag, a skirt or something, on the peak of the cabin," she said, half talking to herself.

"Do you think we ought to go right on to East Cape?" said Lucile.

"We can't decide that now," said Marian. "We need food and sleep and the dogs need rest."

Some broken pieces of drift were piled outside the cabin. These made a ready fire. They were soon enjoying a feast of fried fish and canned baked beans. Then, with their water-soaked mucklucks (skin-boots) and stockings hanging by the fire, they threw deerskin on the rude bunk attached to the wall and were soon fast asleep.

Out on the wreck, some two hundred yards from shore, a figure emerged from a small cabin aft. The stern of the ship had been carried completely about by the violence of the waves. It had left this little cabin, formerly the wireless cabin, high and dry.

The person came out upon the deck and scanned the horizon. Suddenly his eyes fell upon the cabin and the strange white signal which the girls had set fluttering there before they went to sleep.

Sliding a native skin-kiak down from the deck, he launched it, then leaping into the nar-

row seat, began paddling rapidly toward land.

Having beached his kiak, he hurried toward the cabin. His hand was on the latch, when he chanced to glance up at the white emblem of distress which floated over his head.

His hand dropped to his side; his mouth flew open. An expression of amazement spread over his face.

"Jumpin' Jupiter!" he muttered beneath his breath.

He beat a hasty retreat. Once in his kiak he made double time back to the wreck.

Marian was the first to awaken in the cabin. By the dull light that shone through the cracks, she could tell that it was growing dark.

Springing from her bunk, she put her hand to the latch. Hardly had she done this than the door flew open with a force that threw her back against the opposite wall. Fine particles of snow cut her face. The wind set every loose thing in the cabin bobbing and fluttering. The skirt they had attached to a stout pole as a signal was booming overhead like a gun.

"Wow! A blizzard!" she groaned.

Seizing the door, she attempted to close it. Twice the violence of the storm threw her back.

When at last her efforts had been rewarded with success, she turned to rouse her companion.

"Lucile! Lucile! Wake up? A blizzard!"

Lucile turned over and groaned. Then she opened her eyes.

"Wha — wha —" she droned sleepily.

"A blizzard! A blizzard from the north!"

Lucile sat up quickly.

"From the north!" she exclaimed, fully awake in an instant. "The ice?"

"Perhaps."

"And if it comes?"

"We're stuck, that's all, in Siberia for nine months. Won't dare try to cross the Straits on the ice. No white man has ever done it, let alone a woman. Well," she smiled, "we've got food for five days, and five days is a long time. We'd better try to bring in some wood, and get the dogs in here; they'd freeze out there."

CHAPTER VI

THE DREAD WHITE LINE

Three days the blizzard raged about the cabin where Lucile and Marian had found shelter. Such a storm at this season of the year had not been known on the Arctic for more than twenty years.

For three days the girls shivered by the galley range, husbanding their little supply of food, and hoping for something to turn up when the storm was over. Just what that something might be neither of them could have told.

The third day broke clear and cold with the wind still blowing a gale. Lucile was the first to throw open the door. As it came back with a bang, something fell from the beam above and rattled to the floor.

She stooped to pick it up.

"Look, Marian!" she exclaimed. "A key! A big brass key!"

Marian examined it closely.

"What can it belong to?'

"The wreck, perhaps."

"Probably."

"Looks like a steward's pass-key."

"But what would they save it for? You don't think — "

"If we could get out to the wreck we'd see."

"Yes, but we can't. There — "

"Look, Marian!" Lucile's eyes were large and wild.

"The white line!" gasped Marian, gripping her arm.

It was true. Before them lay the dark ocean still flecked with foam, but at the horizon gleaming whiter than burnished silver, straight, distinct, unmistakable, was a white line.

"And that means — "

"We're trapped!"

Lucile sank weakly into a chair. Marian began pacing the floor.

"Anyway," she exclaimed at last, "I can paint it. It will make a wonderful study."

Suiting action to words, she sought out her paint-box and was soon busy with a sketch, which, developing bit by bit, or rather, seeming to evolve out of nothing, showed a native dressed in furs, shading his eyes to scan the dark, tossing ocean. And beyond, the object of his gaze, was the silvery line. When she had finished, she playfully inscribed a title at the bottom:

"The Coming of the White Line."

As she put her paints away, something caught her eye. It was one corner of the blue envelope with the strange address upon it.

"Ah, there you are still," she sighed. "And there you will remain for nine months unless I miss my guess. I wish I hadn't kept my promise to the college boy; wish I'd left you in the pigeon-hole at Cape Prince of Wales."

Since the air was too chill, the wind too keen for travel, the girls slept that night in the cabin.

They awoke to a new world. The first glimpse outside the cabin brought surprised exclamations to their lips. In a single night the world appeared to have been transformed. The "white

line" was gone. So, too, was the ocean. Before them, as far as the eye could reach, lay a mass of yellow lights and purple shadows, ice-fields that had buried the sea. Only one object stood out, black, bleak and bare before them — the hull of the wrecked and abandoned ship.

"Look!" said Lucile suddenly, "we can go out to the ship over the ice-floe!"

"Let's do it," said Marian enthusiastically. "Perhaps there's some sort of a solution to our problem there."

They were soon threading their way in and out among the ice-piles which were already solidly attaching themselves to the sand beneath the shallow water.

And now they reached a spot where the water was deeper, where ice-cakes, some small as a kitchen floor, some large as a town lot, jostled and ground one upon another.

"Wo-oo, I don't like it!" exclaimed Lucile, as she leaped a narrow chasm of dark water.

"We'll soon be there," trilled her companion. "Just watch your step, that's all."

They pushed on, leaping from cake to cake. Racing across a broad ice-pan, now skirting a dark pool, now clambering over a pile of ice ground fine, they made their way slowly but surely toward their goal.

"Listen!" exclaimed Marian, stopping dead in her tracks.

"What is it?" asked Lucile, her voice quivering with alarm.

A strange, wild, weird sound came to them across the floe, a grinding, rushing, creaking, moaning sound that increased in volume as the voice of a cyclone increases.

Only a second elapsed before they knew. Then with a cry of terror Marian dragged her companion to the center of the ice-pan and pulled her flat to its surface. From somewhere, far out to sea, a giant tidal wave was sweeping through the ice-floe. Marian had seen it. The mountain of ice which it bore on its crest seemed as high as the solid ridge of rock behind them on the land. And with its weird, wild, rushing scream of grinding and breaking ice, it was

traveling toward them. It had the speed of the wind, the force of an avalanche. When it came, what then?

With a rush the wild terror of the Arctic sea burst upon them. It lifted the giant ice-pan weighing hundreds of tons, tilted it to a dangerous angle, then dropped from beneath it. Marian's heart stopped beating as she felt the downward rush of the avalanche of ice. The next instant she felt it crumble like an egg-shell. It had broken at the point where they lay. With a warning cry of terror she sprang to her feet and pitched forward.

The cry was too late. As she rose unsteadily to her knees, she saw a dark brown bulk topple at the edge of the cake, then roll like a log into the dark pool of water which appeared where the cake had parted. That object was Lucile. Dead or alive? Marian could not tell. But whether dead or alive she had fallen into the stinging Arctic brine. What chance could there be for her life?

For the time being the ice-field was quiet.

The tidal wave had spent its force on the sandy beach.

That other, less violent disturbances, would follow the first, the girl knew right well. Hastily creeping to the brink of the dark pool, she strained her eyes for sight of a floating bit of cloth, a waving hand. There was none. Despair gripped her heart. Still she waited, and as she waited, there came the distant sound, growing ever louder, of another onrushing tide.

When Lucile went down into the dark pool she was not dead. She was conscious and very much alive. Very conscious she was, too, of the peril of her situation. Should that chasm close before she rose, or as she rose, she was doomed. In one case she would drown, in the other she would be crushed.

Down, down she sank. But the water was salt and buoyant. Now she felt herself rising. Holding her breath she looked upward. A narrow ribbon of black was to the right of her.

"That will be the open water," was her mental comment. "Must swin for it."

She was a strong swimmer, but her heavy fur garments impeded her. The sting of the water imperiled her power to remain conscious. Yet she struggled even as she rose.

Just when Marian had given up hope, she saw a head shoot above the water, then a pair of arms. The next instant she gripped both her companion's wrists and lifted as she never lifted before. There was wild terror in her eye. The roar of the second wave was drumming in her ears.

She was not a second too soon. Hardly had she dragged the half-unconscious girl from the pool than it closed with a grinding crash, and the ice-pan again tilted high in air.

The strain of this onrush was not so great. The cake held together. Gradually it settled back to its place.

Marian glanced in the direction of the wreck. They were very much nearer to it than to the shore. She thought she saw a small cabin in the stern. Lucile must be relieved of her water soaked and fast-freezing garments at once.

"Can you walk?" she asked as Lucile staggered dizzily to her feet. "I'll help you. The wreck — we must get there. You must struggle or you'll freeze."

Lucile did try. She fought as she had never fought before, against the stiffening garments, the aching lungs and muscles, but most of all against the almost unconquerable desire to sleep.

Foot by foot, yard by yard, they made their way across the treacherous tangle of ice-piles which was still in restless motion.

Now they had covered a quarter of the distance, now half, now three-quarters. And now, with an exultant cry, Marian dragged her half-unconscious companion upon the center of the deck.

"There's a cabin aft," she whispered, "a warm cabin. We'll soon be there."

"Soon be there," Lucile echoed faintly.

The climbing of the long, slanting, slippery deck was a terrible ordeal. More than once Marian despaired. At last they stood before the door. She put a hand to the knob. A cry

escaped her lips. The cabin door was locked.

Dark despair gripped her heart. But only for an instant.

"Lucile, the key! The key we found in the cabin! Where is it?"

"The key — the key?" Lucile repeated dreamily.

"Oh, yes, the key. Why, that's not any good."

"Yes, it is! It is!"

"It's in my parka pocket."

The next moment Marian was prying the key from a frozen pocket, and the next after that she was dragging Lucile into the cabin.

In one corner of the cabin stood a small oil-heater. Above it was a match-box. With a cry of joy Marian found matches, lighted one, tried the stove, found it filled with oil. A bright blaze rewarded her efforts. There was heat, heat that would save her companion's life.

She next attacked the frozen garments. Using a knife where nothing else would avail, she stripped the clothing away until at last she

fell to chafing the white and chilled limbs of the girl, who still struggled bravely against the desire to sleep.

A half-hour later Lucile was sleeping naturally in a bunk against the upper wall of the room. She was snuggled deep in the interior of a mammoth deerskin sleeping-bag, while her garments were drying beside the kerosene stove. Marian was drowsing half-asleep by the fire.

Suddenly, she was aroused by a voice. It was a man's voice. She was startled.

"Please," the voice said, "may I come in? That's supposed to be my cabin, don't you know? But I don't want to be piggish."

Marian stared wildly about her. For a second she was quite speechless. Then she spoke: "Wait — wait a minute; I'm coming out."

CHAPTER VII

THE BLUE ENVELOPE DISAPPEARS

When Marian heard the voice outside the cabin on the wreck, she realized that a new problem, a whole set of new problems had arisen. Here was a man. Who was he? Could he be the grizzled miner who had demanded the blue envelope? If so, what then? Was there more than one man? What was to come of it all, anyway?

All this sped through her mind while she was drawing on her parka. The next moment she had opened the door, stepped out and closed the door behind her.

"Ah! I have the pleasure —"

"You?" Marian gasped.

For a second she could say no more. Before her, dressed in a jaunty parka of Siberian squirrel-skin, was her frank-faced college boy, he of the Phi Beta Ki.

"Why, yes," he said rather awkwardly, "it is I. Does it seem so strange? Well, yes, I dare say it does. Suppose you sit down and I'll tell you about it."

Marian sat down on a section of the broken rail.

"Well, you see," he began, a quizzical smile playing about his lips, "when I had completed my — my — well, my mission to the north of Cape Prince of Wales, it was too late to return by dog-team. I waited for a boat. I arrived at the P. O. you used to keep. You were gone. So was my letter."

"Yes, you said — "

"That was quite all right; the thing I wanted you to do. But you see that letter is mighty important. I had to follow. This craft we're sitting on was coming this way. I took passage. She ran into a mess of bad luck. First we were picked up by an ice-floe and carried far into the Arctic Ocean. When at last we poled our way out of that, we were caught by a storm and carried southwest with such violence that we were

thrown upon this sandbar. The ship broke up some, but we managed to stick to her until the weather calmed. We went ashore and threw some of the wreckage into the form of a cabin. You've been staying there, I guess." He grinned.

Marian nodded.

"Well, the ship was hopeless. Natives came in their skin-boats from East Cape."

"East Cape? How far — how far is that?"

"Perhaps ten miles. Why?"

He studied the girl's startled face.

"Nothing; only didn't a white man come with the natives?"

"A white man?"

"I've heard there was one staying there."

"No, he didn't come."

Marian settled back in her seat.

"Well," he went on, "the captain of this craft traded everything on board to the natives for furs; everything but some food. I bought that from him. You see, they were determined to get away as soon as possible. I was just as

determined to stay. I didn't know exactly where you were, but was bound I'd find you and — and the letter." He paused.

"By the way," he said, struggling to conceal his intense interest, "have — have you the letter?"

Marian nodded. "It is in my paint-box over in the cabin."

The boy sprang eagerly to his feet. "May we not go fetch it?"

"I can't leave my friend."

"Then may I go?" He was eager as a child.

Then after a second, "Why, by Jove! I'm selfish. Haven't given you a chance to say a thing. Perhaps your friend's in trouble. Of course she is, or she'd be out here before this. What is it? Can I help you?"

"She's only chilled and recovering from a trifling shock. The tidal wave threw her into the sea."

"Oh!" The boy stood thinking for a moment. "Do — do you intend to remain in Siberia all winter?"

"We had no such intentions when we came, but the storm and the white line caught us. No more boats now."

"The white line of ice from the north? No more boats this season?"

Then quickly, "Say, you two can keep my cabin. The shack on the beach is poor, and I dare say you haven't much food. There's a bunk below the deck where I can be quite comfortable. We'll be snug as a bug in a bushel basket."

Marian lifted a hand in feeble protest. What was the use? They were trapped in Siberia. Here was an American who seemed at least to be a friend.

"I'll go for your things. You stay here. Any dogs?"

"Three."

"Good! I'll be back quicker than you think."

He was away. Bounding from ice-cake to ice-cake he soon disappeared. Marian turned to enter the cabin.

Lucile was still asleep. Marian sat down to

think. She was not certain that their position was at all improved. They knew so little of the young stranger. She felt almost resentful at his occupation of the wireless cabin. They could have been quite cozy there alone. Then again, in quite another mood, she was glad the stranger was here; he might suggest a means of escape from the exile and might assist in carrying it out. At any rate, if they were forced to go to East Cape for food, they would not be afraid to go under his guard.

She fell to wondering if he had reached the shore safely. Leaving the cabin, she climbed to the highest point on the rail. There she stood for some time scanning the horizon.

"Strange he'd be way down there!" she murmured, at last. "Quarter of a mile south of the cabin. Perhaps the ice carried him south."

The distance was so great she could distinguish a figure, a mere speck, moving in and out among the ice-piles that lined the shore.

For a moment she rested her eyes by studying the ship's deck. Then again she gazed away.

"Why," she exclaimed suddenly, "he has reached the cabin! Must have run every step of the way!"

In the cabin on shore, the young stranger began packing the girl's possessions preparatory to putting them on the sled.

"Some careless housekeeper!" he grumbled as he gathered up articles of clothing from every corner of the room, and, having straightened out Marian's paint-box, closed its cover down with a click. He arrived at the schooner an hour later. The sled load was soon stowed away in the wireless cabin.

He brought a quantity of food, canned vegetables, bacon, hardtack, coffee and sugar from his store below. Then he stood by the door.

Marian was bustling about the cabin, putting things to rights.

"Wants to make a good impression," was the young man's mental comment.

Lucile, a trifle pale, was sitting in the corner.

Presently Marian caught sight of him standing there.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "you are waiting for your reward?"

"Any time," he smiled.

"You shall have it right now — the blue envelope."

She seized her paint-box, and throwing back the cover lifted the paint-tray. Then from her lips escaped one word:

"Gone!"

He sprang eagerly forward.

"Can't be," Lucile breathed.

"Take a good look," the boy suggested.

Marian inspected the box thoroughly.

"No," she said with an air of finality, "it's not here."

"Your — er — the paint-box was a bit disarranged," he stammered.

"Disarranged?"

"Well, not in the best of order. Letter might have dropped out in the cabin. I dare say it's on the floor back there. Had you seen it lately?"

"Only this morning. I can't understand

about the box. The wind must have blown it down, or something."

"I dare say." The boy smiled good-naturedly as he recalled the disordered room.

"I'll hop right back and look for it." He was away like a flash.

It was with a very dejected air that he returned. Marian could not tell whether it was genuine or feigned. Had he been in such haste to secure the letter that he had taken it at once from the box? Was all his later action mere stage-play?

"No," he said, bringing forth a forlorn smile, "I couldn't find it. It's not there."

That evening, after a supper served on a small tip-down table in the wireless cabin, after the boy had gone to his bunk below, and Lucile had fallen asleep, Marian lay awake a long time puzzling over the mysteries of the past and the problems of the future. Where had the blue envelope disappeared to? Did the boy have it? She resolved to search the cabin on the beach for herself. She felt half-inclined to talk mat-

ters over frankly with him. There were mysteries which might be cleared up. She remembered with what astonishing speed he had reached the cabin once he had sprung upon the shore. She remembered, too, how he had spoken of the disordered paint-box. She prided herself on neatness. And that paint-box, was it not her work-shop, her most prized possession? She longed to talk it over with him. But on the other hand, she could not bring herself to feel that her trust in him was fully warranted. She hated above all things to be "taken in." If she discussed all these things with him, and if, at the same time, the letter rested in his pocket, wouldn't she be taken in for fair? Wouldn't she, though?

"No," she pressed her lips tight shut, "no, I won't."

But even as she said this, she saw again the downhearted expression on his face, heard his mournful, "I couldn't find it. It's not there." With that she relented. and ere she slept resolved to take up the matter of the mysterious

disappearance with him the first thing in the morning.

But morning found the boy in quite a different mood. He laughed and chatted gayly over his sour-dough pancakes.

"Now you know," he said, as he shoved back his stool, "I like your company awfully well, and I'd like to keep this up indefinitely, but truth is I can't; I've got to get across the Straits."

"We'll be sorry to lose you," laughed Marian; "but just you run along. And when you get there tell the missionary breakfast is ready. Ask him to step over and eat with us."

"No, but I'm serious."

"Then you're crazy. No white man has ever crossed thirty-five miles of floeing ice."

"There's always to be a first. Natives do it, don't they?"

"I've heard they do."

"I can go anywhere a native can, providing he doesn't get out of my sight."

"A guide across the Straits! It's a grand idea!" Marian seized Lucile about the waist

and went hopping out on deck. "A guide across the Straits. We'll be home for Christmas dinner yet!"

"What, you don't mean —" The boy stared in astonishment.

"Sure I do. We can go anywhere you can, providing you don't get out of our sight."

"That — why, that will be bully."

He said this with lagging enthusiasm. It was evident that he doubted their power of endurance.

"We'll have to go to East Cape to start," he suggested.

"East Cape?" Marian exclaimed in a startled tone.

"Sure. What's wrong with East Cape?"

"Nothing. Only — only that's where that strange white man is."

"What's so terrible about him?"

Marian hesitated. She had come to the end of a blind alley. Should she tell him of her experience with the miner who demanded the blue envelope, and of her suspicion that this man at

East Cape was that same man?

She looked into his frank blue eyes for a moment, then said to herself, "Yes, I will."

She did tell him the whole story. When she had finished, there was a new, a very friendly light in the boy's eyes.

"I say," he exclaimed, "That was bully good of you. It really was. That man — "

He hesitated. Marian thought she was going to be told the whole secret of the blue envelope.

"That man," he repeated, "he won't hurt you. You need have no fear of him. As for yours truly, meaning me, I can take care of myself. We start for East Cape today. What say?"

"All right."

Marian sprang to her feet, and, after imparting the news to Lucile, who had by this time fully recovered from the shock of the previous day, set to work packing their sled for the journey.

All the time she was packing her mind was working. She had meant to discuss the mys-

terious disappearance of the blue envelope with the college boy. Even as she thought of this, there flashed through her mind the question, "Why is he so cheerful now? Why so anxious to get across the Straits?"

One explanation alone came to her. He had deceived them. The envelope was secure in his possession. It had imparted to him news of great importance. He was eager to cross the Straits and put its instructions into execution. What these instructions might be, she could not tell. The North was a place of rare furs, ivory and much gold. Anything was possible.

"No," she almost exploded between tight-set teeth, "no, I won't talk it over with him. I won't."

One thing, however, she did do. Under pretense of missing some article from her wardrobe when on the beach ready to start for East Cape, she hastened to the cabin on the beach, and executed a quick search for the missing envelope. The search was unrewarded.

One thing, though, arrested her attention for

a moment. As she left the cabin she noticed, near the door, the print of a man's skin-boot in the snow. It was an exceedingly large print; such as is made by a careless white man who buys the first badly-made skin-boots offered to him by a native seamstress. The college boy could not have made that track. His skin-boots had been made by some Eskimo woman of no mean ability. She had fitted them to his high-arched and shapely feet, as she might have done had he been her Eskimo husband.

"Oh, well," she exclaimed, as she raced to join her companions, "probably some native who has passed this way."

Even as she said it, she doubted her own judgment. She had never in her life seen a native wear such a clumsy and badly-shaped skin-boot.

CHAPTER VIII

THE VISIT TO THE CHUKCHES

It was with a feeling of strange misgiving that Marian found herself on the evening of the day they left the wreck entering the native village of East Cape. Questions continually presented themselves to her mind. What of the bearded stranger? Was he the miner who had demanded the blue envelope? If it were he; if he appeared and once more demanded the letter, what should she say? For any proof ever presented to her, he might be the rightful owner, the real Phi Beta Ki. What could she say to him? And the natives? Had they heard of the misfortunes of the people of Whaling? Would they, too, allow superstitious fear to overcome them? Would they drive the white girls from their midst?

This last problem did not trouble her greatly, however. They would find a guide at once and

begin their great adventure of crossing from the Old World to the New on the ice-floe.

An interpreter was not hard to find. Many of the men had sailed on American whalers. They were told by one of these that there was but one man in all the village who ever attempted the dangerous passage of Bering Straits. His name was O-bo-gok.

O-bo-gok was found sitting cross-legged on the sloping floor of his skin-igloo, adjusting a new point to his harpoon.

"You tell him," said the smiling college boy, "that we want to go to Cape Prince of Wales. Can he go tomorrow?"

The interpreter threw up his hands in surprise, but eventually delivered his message.

The guide, a swarthy fellow, with shaggy, drooping moustache and a powerful frame, did not look up from his work. He merely grunted.

"He say, that one, no can do," smiled the interpreter.

The college boy was not disturbed. He jingled something in his hand. Marian, who stood be-

side him, saw that he held three double eagles. She smiled, for she knew that even here the value of yellow disks marked with those strange pictures which Uncle Sam imprints upon them was known.

The man, dropping his harpoon, began to talk rapidly. He waved his hands. He bobbed his head. At last he arose, sprang from the sleeping compartment and began to walk the space before the open fire. He was still talking. It seemed as if he would never run down.

When at last he had finished and had thrown himself once more upon the floor of the sleeping-room, the interpreter began:

"He say, that one, he say, 'Wanna go Cape Prince Wales two month, three month, all right, maybe. Go now? Not go.' He say, that one, 'Wanna go now; never come back.' He say, that one, 'Two, three, four days come ice. Not plenty ice,' say that one. 'Some water, some ice. See water. Too much water. Wanna cross. No cross. Quick starve. Quick freeze.'

"'He say, that one, 'Tide crack spirit all-a-

time lift ice, push ice this way, that way. Wanna kill man. No can go.'

"He say, that one, 'Great dead whale spirit wanna lift ice, wanna throw ice this way, that way, all way. Wanna kill man. Man no go Cape Prince Wales.'

"He say, that one, 'Wanna go Cape Prince Wales, mebby two month, mebby three month. Mebby can do. Can't tell,' he say, that one."

The college boy smiled a grim smile and pocketed his gold.

"Which all means," he said, "that the ice is not sufficiently compact, not well enough frozen together for the old boy to risk a passage, and that we'll be obliged to wait until he thinks it's O. K. Probably two or three months. Meanwhile, welcome to our village! Make yourselves at home!" He threw back his shoulders and laughed a boyish laugh.

"Oh!" exclaimed Marian, ready to indulge in a childish bit of weeping.

"Yes," smiled the boy, "but think of the sketches you'll have time to make."

"No canvas," she groaned.

"That's easy. Use squares of this sealskin the women tan white for making slippers."

"The very thing!" exclaimed Marian. She was away at once in search of some of this new style canvas, in her eagerness to be at work on some winter sketches of these most interesting people, quite forgetting the peril of natives, the danger of the food supply giving out, the probability of an unpleasant meeting with the bearded stranger.

Lucile, always of a more practical frame of mind, at once attacked the knotty problem of securing comfort and food for her little party. The question of a warm shelter during these months of sweeping winds and biting frost was solved for them by the aged chief Nepos-sok. He furnished them with a winter igloo. An interesting type of home they found it and one offering great comfort. An outer covering of walrus skin was supported by tall poles set in a semicircle and meeting at the top. The inside of this tepee-like structure was lined with a

great circling robe of long-haired deerskin. The hair on these winter skins was two inches long and matted thick as felt. When this lining had been hung, a floor of hand-hewn boards was built across the rear side of the inclosure. This floor, about six by eight feet, was covered with a deerskin rug, over which were thrown lighter robes of soft fawn skin and out-of-season fox skins. Above this floor were hung curtains of deerskin. This sleeping room became a veritable box of long-haired deerskins. When it was completed the girls found it, with a seal oil lamp burning in it, warm and cozy as a steam-heated bedroom.

"Who could dream of anything so comfortable in a wilderness like this?" murmured Lucile before falling asleep in their new home on the first night.

Phi was given a place in the chief's sleeping room.

The space in the igloo before the girls' sleeping room was given over to stores. It was used too as kitchen and dining room. Here, by a

snapping fire of dwarf willows, the three of them sat on the edge of the sleeping room floor and munched hardtack or dipped baked beans from tin cans.

The problem of securing a variety of food was a difficult one. The supply from the ship was found to be over-abundant in certain lines and woefully lacking in others: plenty of beans and sweet corn in cans, some flour and baking powder but no lard or bacon; some frozen and worthless potatoes; plenty of jelly in glasses; a hundred pounds of sugar. So it ran. Lucile was hard pressed to know how to cook with no oven in which to do baking and with no lard for shortening.

She had been studying this problem for some time when one day she suddenly exclaimed, "I have it!"

Drawing on her parka she hurried to the chief's igloo and asked for seal oil. Gravely he poured a supply of dark liquid from a wooden container into a tin cup.

Lucile put this to her lips for a taste. The

next instant she with great difficulty set the cup on the floor while all her face was distorted with loathing.

"Rotten!" she sputtered. "A year old!"

"Eh — eh," grinned the chief, "always eat 'em so, Chukche." Thoroughly disheartened, she left the igloo. But on her way back she came upon a woman skinning a seal. Seeing the thick layer of fat that was taken from beneath the animal's skin she hastened to trade three cans of beans for it. Bearing this home in triumph she soon had the fat trying out over a slow fire.

Seal oil proved to be quite as good cooking oil as lard. Even doughnuts fried in it were pronounced delicious by the ever-hungry Phi.

Experimenting with native food was interesting. Seal steak was not bad, and seal liver was as good as calf's liver. Polar bear steak and walrus stew were impossible. "Wouldn't even make good hamburger," was Phi's verdict. The boiled flipper of a white-whale was tender as chicken. But when a hind quarter of reindeer

meat found its way into the village there was feasting indeed.

In a land so little known as this one does not seek long for opportunities to express strange and unusual things. Marian had not been established a week with Lucile in their igloo, when an unusual opportunity presented itself.

Among the supplies brought from the ship was found a well-equipped medicine-chest. During her long visits in out-of-the-way places, Marian had learned much of the art of administering simple remedies. She had not been in the village three days before her fame as a doctor became known to all the village.

She had learned, with a feeling of great relief, that the bearded stranger who had posed as a witch-doctor had gone away from the village. Whether he had gone toward Whaling, or south to some other village, no one appeared to know. Now that he had departed, it seemed obvious that she was destined to take his place as the village practitioner.

It was during one of her morning "clinics,"

as she playfully called them, that a native of strange dress brought his little girl to her for treatment. The ailment seemed but a simple cold. Marian prescribed cough syrup and quinine, then called for the next patient. Patients were few that morning. She soon found herself wandering up the single street of the village. There she encountered the strange native and his child.

"Who are they?" she asked of a boy who understood English.

"Reindeer Chukches."

"Reindeer Chukches?" she exclaimed excitedly. "Where do they live?"

"Oh, mebby fifteen miles from here."

"Do they live on the tundra as they used to?"

"Yes."

"Are there many of them?"

"Not now. Many, one time. Now very few. Not many reindeer. Too much not moss. Plenty starve. Plenty die."

"Ask the Chukche," Marian said eagerly, "if I may go home with him to see his people."

The boy spoke for a moment with the grave-visaged stranger.

"He say, that one, he say yes," smiled the boy.

"Tell him I will be back quick." Marian was away like a shot.

Tearing into their igloo she drove Lucile into a score of activities. The medicine chest was filled and closed, paints stowed in their box, garments packed, sleeping-bags rolled up. Then they were away.

Ere she knew it, Lucile was tucked in behind a fleet-footed reindeer, speeding over the low hills.

"Now, please tell me where we are going," she asked with a smile.

"We are going to visit the most unique people in all the world — the Reindeer Chukches. They are almost an extinct race now, but the time was when every clump of willows that lined the banks of the rivers of the far north in Siberia hid one of their igloos, and every hill and tundra fed one of their herds.

"Long before the Eskimos of Alaska thought

of herding the reindeer, short-haired deerskin and soft, spotted fawn-skins were traded across Bering Straits and far up along the Alaskan coast. These skins came from the camps of the Reindeer Chukches of Siberia. Many years ago the Mikado of Japan, in the treasure of furs with which he decorated his royal family, besides the mink, ermine and silver fox, had skins of rare beauty, spotted skins, brown, white and black. These were fawn-skins traded from village to village until they reached Japan. They came from the camps of the Reindeer Chukches. And now we are to see them as they were many years ago, for they have not changed. And I am to paint them! Paint them! Think of it!"

"Yes, but," Lucile smiled doubtfully, "supposing the ice gets solid while we're gone. Suppose Phi takes a fancy to cross without us? What then?"

Marian's face sobered for a moment. But the zeal of a born artist and explorer was upon her.

"Oh, fudge!" she exclaimed, "it won't. He

won't. I — I — why, I'll hurry. We'll be back at East Cape in no time at all."

No wildest nomadic dream could have exceeded the life which the two girls lived in the weeks that followed.

Trailing a reindeer herd over hills and tundra; camping now in a clump of willows by the glistening ice of a stream, now beneath some shelving rock, and now in the open, wind-swept tundra; eating about an open fire, while the smoke curled from the top of the dome of the tepee-like igloo, they reveled in the strange wildness of it all. Here was a people who paid no rent, no taxes, owned no land yet lived always in abundance. In the box beside the sleeping platform were tea and sugar. Over the fire hung a copper teakettle of ancient design. In the sleeping-box, which was made of long-haired deerskins, were many robes of short-haired deerskin, fawn-skin and Siberian squirrel.

To all these the two girls were more than welcome. Their guide and his daughter did not

live alone. A little tribe whose twenty igloos dotted the tundra traveled with him. These people were sometimes in need of simple remedies. For these they were singularly grateful. They, their women and their children, posed untiringly for sketches. But one thing Marian had not taken into consideration; these people seldom visited the village of East Cape. Although she did not know it, their herds were at this time feeding away from this trading metropolis of the Straits region. Each day while she seized every opportunity to sketch and hastened her work as much as she could, found them some ten miles farther from East Cape.

When at last, by signs and such native words as she knew, she indicated to her native friends that she was ready to return to East Cape, they stared at her in astonishment and indicated by a diagram on the snow that they were now at a point three days' journey from that town and that none of them expected to return before the moon was again full.

No amount of gesturing and jabbering could

make them understand that it was necessary for the girls to return at once.

"We'll never get back," Marian mourned in despair, "and it's all my fault."

"Oh, we'll make it still," encouraged Lucile, cheerfully. "Probably the Straits are not fully frozen over yet anyway."

However, after a week of inaction, even Lucile lost her cheerful smile.

One morning, after they had reached what appeared to be the final depths of despair, they heard a cry of, "Tomai! Tomai! Tomai," rise in a chorus from among the tents. By this they knew that visitors had arrived. They hurried out to find the villagers grouped about three fur-clad figures standing beside three reindeer hitched to sleds of a strange design.

By a few words and by signs they were made to understand that these people came from a point some two hundred miles farther north, a village on the north coast of Russia.

As ever, eager to look upon some new type, Marian crowded through the throng when, to

her immense surprise, the smaller of the three, in reality only a boy, sprang forward, and, kneeling at her feet, kissed the fur fringe of her parka.

This action, so unusual among these natives, struck her dumb. But once he had looked up into her face, she understood all; he was none other than the strange brown boy who had come swimming to them from the sea off the coast of Washington.

She was so surprised and startled at first sight of him that she found herself incapable of action. It seemed to her that she must be seeing a ghost. It appeared entirely incredible that he should be in this out of the way place when they had left him, months before, on a deserted island of Puget Sound.

Her second reaction was one of great joy; here was someone who really owed them a debt of gratitude. Might they not hope to receive assistance from him in solving the problem of making their way to the shore of Bering Straits?

Springing to his feet, the boy mingled native

dialect with badly spoken English in his expression of joy at meeting them again.

At last, when the crowd had gone its way and the girls had invited him to their tent, he told them in the few words of English he had learned since seeing them, and with many clever drawings, the story of his adventures.

He was a native of the north coast of Russia; a far away point where white men's boats never come. One whaleship had, however, been carried there by the ice-floes. After trading for the natives' furs and ivory, and having found an open channel of water to the east, the captain had kidnaped him and carried him from his home. He had been made the captain's slave.

So badly was he treated, over-worked, kicked, cuffed and beaten, that when at last he saw land off the coast of Washington, dressed only in his bird-skin suit, he had leaped overboard when no one was looking and had attempted to swim ashore.

The ship had passed on out of sight. He had been swimming for two hours when the girls

rescued him from what was almost sure to have been a watery grave, for he was almost ready to give up hope.

He had been missed from the ship and the captain, fearing the strong arm of the law if he were rescued by others, sent three seamen to search for him along the island. How he had fared with these, the girls knew well enough.

After leaving the camp of the girls he had wandered in the woods and along the beach for two weeks. He had at last been picked up by some honest fishermen who turned him over to the revenue cutter which made Alaskan ports. By the cutter he had been carried to Nome and from there made his way, little by little, by skin-boat, dog-team, and reindeer back to his native village. When he had finished telling his story he turned to Marian and said:

"Idel-bene?" (yours) meaning he would like to hear their story.

Marian was not slow in telling their troubles.

"Me, I will take you back," the boy exclaimed as she finished. "To-day we go."

Two hours later, with sleds loaded, they were discussing two possible trails, one leading down a river where blizzards constantly threatened, the other a valley trail through wolf-infested hills. The latter course was finally chosen, since it promised to be the least dangerous at that time of the year. Then they were away.

CHAPTER IX

A CLOSE CALL

They had made half the distance to the village. Hopes were running high, when something occurred which threatened disaster.

Far up on the side of the hill along the base of which they were traveling, there stood here and there a clump of scraggly, wind-torn fir trees. Suddenly there appeared from out one of these clumps of scrub trees, a gray streak. Another appeared, then another and another, until there were six. They did not pause at the edge of the bush, but rushed with swift, gliding motion down the steep hillside, and their course led them directly toward the little caravan. Six gaunt gray wolves they were, a pack of brigands in the Arctic desert.

Perhaps Marian, who rode on the last sled, saw them first. Perhaps Ad-loo-at, the native, did. At any rate, before she could scream a

warning to him he had slapped his reindeer on the back and the sled on which Marian rode shot forward so suddenly that she was nearly thrown from her seat. In driving in the north they do not travel single file, but each deer runs beside the sled of the one before it. The driver who is to occupy the foremost position chooses the best trained deer and attaches two reins to his halter that he may guide him. The drivers who follow use but one rein. By jerking this they can cause the reindeer to go faster, but they have no power to guide him. He simply trots along in his place beside the other sled.

Marian had thought this an admirable arrangement until now. It left her free to admire the sharp triangles of deep purple and light yellow which lay away in the distance, a massive mountain range whose tops at times smoked with the snow of an oncoming blizzard. Or, if she tired of this, she might sit and dream of many things as they glided over the snow. But now with a wolf-pack on their trail, with the nearest human habitation many miles away, with

her reindeer doing his utmost to keep up with the racing lead-deer, that slender jerk-line with which she could do so little seemed a fragile "life-line" in case of emergency.

With wrinkled brow she watched the pack which now had made its way down the hillside and was following in full cry on their trail. They were not gaining; her heart was cheered by that. At least she did not think they were, yet, yes, there was one, a giant wolf, a third larger than his fellows, outstripping the others. Now he appeared to be ten yards ahead of them, now twenty, now thirty. The rest were only holding the pace of the reindeer, but this one was gaining, there was no mistaking that. She shivered at the thought.

It was a perilous moment, and she felt so helpless. She longed to urge her deer to go faster. She could not do that. He was keeping his place with difficulty. She could only sit and hope that somehow the wolf-leader would tire of the chase.

Even now she was not sorry they had come,

but it was unfortunate, she thought, that there were no rifles on their sleds. Ad-loo-at had taken with him only an old-fashioned native lance, a sharp steel point set upon a long wooden handle. That was all the weapon they had and, foot by foot, yard by yard, the gaunt, gray marauder was coming closer. Marian fancied she could hear the chop-chop of his frothing jaws.

Then, suddenly came catastrophe. With the mad perversity of his kind, her sled deer, suddenly turning from his position beside the sled, whirled about in a wide, sweeping circle which threatened to overturn her sled and leave her alone, defenseless against the hungry pack.

It was a terrible moment. Gripping the ropings of the sled with one hand, she tugged at the jerk-rein with the other.

"It's no use," she cried in despair; "I can't turn him."

One glance down the trail turned her heart faint; her sled-deer was now racing almost directly toward the oncoming pack, the gray leader not a hundred yards away.

In desperation, she threw herself from the sled, and, grasping at some dwarf willows as she slid, attempted to check the career of the mad deer. Twice her grip was broken, but the third time it held; the deer was brought round with a wrench which nearly dislocated her shoulder.

And now the deer for the first time scented danger. With a wild snort he turned to face the oncoming foe. A large deer with all his scraggly antlers might hold a single wolf at bay, but this deer's antlers had been cut to mere stubs that he might travel more lightly. With such weapons he must quickly come to grief.

It was a tragic moment. Marian searched her brain for a plan. Flight was now out of the question, yet defense seemed impossible; there was not a weapon on her sled.

Suddenly her heart leaped for joy. The fight was to be taken from her hand. Ad-loo-at, with the faithful oversight which he exercised over those entrusted to his care, having seen all that had happened had whirled his deer about, tied it

to Lucile's sled and now came racing over the snow. He swung above his head the trusty native lance which had meant defeat to so many wild beasts in the days of long ago.

But what was this? Instead of dashing right at the enemy, the Eskimo boy was coming straight for the reindeer and on the opposite side from that on which the wolf was approaching.

"He doesn't see the leader," Marian groaned. "He thinks the rest of the pack are all there are."

But in another second she knew this to be untrue, for, stooping low, the boy appeared to go on all fours as he glided over the snow; he was stalking the wolf even as the wolf was stalking the deer.

Realizing that the wolf was planning to attack the deer and not her, Marian set herself to watch a spectacle such as she would seldom witness in a lifetime.

She had often seen the antics of the Eskimo and Chukche hunters as they performed in the cosgy (common workroom) during the long

Arctic nights. She had seen them go through this gliding motion which Ad-loo-at practiced now. She had seen them turn, leap in the air and kick as high as their heads with both feet, landing again on their feet with a smile. She had admired these feats, which no white boy could do, but had thought them only a form of play. Now she was beginning to realize that they were part of the training for just such emergencies as this.

Now her eyes were on the wolf, and now on the boy. As the wolf approached she cringed back to the very end of her jerk-line. She saw his red tongue lolling, heard the chop-chop of his iron jaws and caught the wicked gleam of his eyes.

The boy appeared to time his pace, for he came on more slowly. The deer, still facing the wolf, gave forth a wild snort of rage. He appeared to be unconscious of the fact that he was as defenseless as his driver.

Now the wolf was but a few yards away. Suddenly, pausing, he sprang quickly to the

right, to the left, then to the right again. Before the deer could recover his bewildered senses, the wolf leaped full for his side.

But someone else leaped too. With a marvelous spring, the Eskimo boy landed full upon the reindeer's back. Coming face to face with the surprised and enraged wolf, he poised his lance for the fatal thrust. But at that instant, with a bellow of fear, the deer bolted.

In wild consternation Marian tugged at the skin-rope. In another moment she had the deer under control and turned to witness a battle royal. The Eskimo had been thrown from the deer's back, but, agile as a cat, he had landed upon his feet and had turned to face the enemy. He was not a moment too soon, for with a snarl of fury the wolf was upon him.

For a fraction of a second the lance gleamed. Came a snarl, half of rage, half of fear, as the wolf fell backward. But he was on his feet again. It was to no purpose. All was over in an instant. Long practice with the lance had given the boy power to baffle his enemy and send

the lance straight to the wild beast's heart.

"Come," Marian was startled by the sound of his voice at her side. She had managed to retain her hold on the jerk-rein. She now felt it being taken from her, knew that she was being lifted onto the sled and, the next moment, sensed the cool breeze that fanned her cheek. They were racing away to join Lucile and to continue their journey.

As she looked back, she saw the cowardly pack snarling over the bones of their fallen leader, and realizing that all danger was past, settled down in her place with a sigh as she said:

"That — that was a very close one."

"Too much close," Ad-loo-at smiled back. "In north we must go — how you say it — pre — pre — "

"Prepared," supplemented Marian. "We'll never travel again without rifles."

"Oh! yes. Mebby," the boy smiled back. "Mebby all right. Mebby rifle miss fire. Him never miss fire." He patted first his lance, then

the muscles of his strong right arm. "Better prepared think mine."

Marian smiled as the brown boy ran ahead to free his own deer and prepare to continue the journey. "Surely," she thought, "physical fitness is a great thing. The boy has paid us well for fighting his battles for him on Puget Sound."

No further adventures befell them on their journey, but it was with thankful hearts that they saw the familiar outlines of the village at East Cape. As the reindeer came to a stop they sprang from their sled, but Ad-loo-at made no move to follow them. "Me — I go back," he said gravely. "You safe — I no stay."

"But you must rest — and eat," remonstrated Lucile. "And the reindeers, they need rest."

"Huh," came the answer, with a shrug. "Better time to rest when all work is done. Me young; reindeers young — we rest at camp."

"But you must wait till I — I — well, there is something that I — that you — " Lucile fum-

bled for the right words. She sensed that the boy, for all his youth, had a grown-up way of looking at things. There was that talisman she had carried ever since that night he had left them there on the island of Puget Sound — the three elk teeth set with jade and an uncut diamond. "Don't let him go, Marian, till I come back."

She darted into their igloo, to return an instant later, the odd jewel gleaming in her hand. At sight of it a smile spread over Ad-loo-at' face. "Ch — k!" he chuckled.

"You must take it back," Lucile demanded.

The boy threw back his head and laughed boisterously. "It is a charm," he said. "Can one Chukche take back a charm? It will keep you — what you say? — safe, yes. Me, I have this." He held up his lance.

"But you must," urged Marian in turn.

"Must — hear you that, reindeer. Heya! let us go!" He waved his lance aloft in farewell. "Heya — mush!" he commanded, and the three reindeer broke into the untiring stride that

would soon carry them from sight. The two girls stood watching him till, with a last wave of his hand, he disappeared around a hill. Then, alone again, they thought of Phi.

"I wonder if he has gone on without us," said Marian.

"I wonder. No, there he is!" exclaimed Lucile. "He's coming down the hill to meet us."

"Are — are we too late?" Lucile faltered as he reached their side.

"About six hours, I should say," Phi grinned.

"Six hours?"

"His nibs, the old Chukche guide, left for Cape Prince of Wales and all suburban points some six hours ago. Some one offered him more money than I did. I have a fancy it was your friend, the bearded miner who wanted my mail."

"And — and you waited for us?"

"Naturally, since the guide left."

"But you could have gone sooner?"

"Some three days, I'm told."

"But you didn't?"

He smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

Marian's head whirled. She was torn between conflicting emotions. Most of all, she felt terribly ashamed. Here was a boy she had not fully trusted, yet he had given up a chance to escape to freedom and had waited for them.

"I — I beg your pardon," she said weakly. She sat down rather unsteadily on the reindeer sled.

"We couldn't help it," she said presently. "They just wouldn't bring us back. Isn't there some other way?"

"I've thought of a possible one. I'll make a little try-out. Be back in an hour."

Phi was off like a flash. A few minutes later the girls thought they heard him calling old Rover, who had been left in his care.

"Wonder what he wants of him?" said Lucile.

"I don't know," said Marian. "But I do know I'm powerful hungry. Let's go find something to eat."

CHAPTER X

FINDING THE TRAIL

"I think we can go." Phi smiled as he spoke. His hour for a try-out had expired. He was back.

"Can — can we cross the Straits?" Marian asked, breathless with emotion.

"I think so."

"How?"

"Got a new guide. I'll show you. Be ready in a half-hour. Bring your pictures and a little food. Not much. Wear snowshoes. Ice is terribly piled up."

He disappeared in the direction of his own igloo.

Marian looked about the cozy deerskin home where were stored their few belongings, then gazed away at the masses of deep purple shadows that stretched across the imprisoned ocean. For a moment courage failed her.

"Perhaps," she said to herself, "it would be better to try to winter here."

But even as she thought this, she caught a vision of that time when she and her companion had been crowded out of a native village to shift for themselves. Then, too, she thought of the possible starving-time in the spring, after the white bear had gone north and before walrus would come, or trading schooners.

"No," she said out loud, "no, we'd better try it."

When the girls joined Phi on the edge of the ice-floe, they looked about for the guide but saw none. Only Rover barked them a welcome.

"Where's the guide?" asked Lucile.

"You'll see. C'm'on," said the boy, leading the way.

For a mile they traveled over the solid shore-ice. They then came to a stretch of water, dark as midnight. At the edge of this was a two-seated kiak.

Phi motioned Lucile to a seat. Deftly, he

paddled her across to the other side. It was with a sinking feeling that she felt herself silently carried toward the north by the gigantic ice-floe.

Marian and the dog were quickly ferried over. Then, after drawing the kiak upon the ice, the boy turned directly north and began walking rapidly. At times he broke into a run.

"Have to make good time," he explained as he snatched Marian's roll of sketches from her hand. "Got to get the trail."

They did make good time. Alternately running and walking, they kept up a pace of some six or seven miles an hour.

"Why, I thought — thought we were going to go east," puffed Marian. "We're just going down the beach."

Phi did not answer.

They had raced on for nearly an hour when they suddenly came upon a kiak drawn up as theirs had been on the ice.

"Ah! I thought so," said the boy. "Now's the time for a guide. Here, Rover!"

He seized the dog by his collar and set him on the invisible trail of the men who had deserted that kiak. The dog walked slowly away, sniffing the ice as he went. His course was due east. The three followed him in silence. Presently his speed increased. He took on an air of confidence. With tail up, ears back, he sniffed the ice only now and then as he dashed over great, flat pans, then over little mountains of broken ice, to emerge again upon flat surfaces.

Marian understood, and her admiration for Phi grew. He had found the trail of the men who had crossed the Straits before them. He had put Rover on that trail. Rover could not fail to follow. The trail was fresh, only seven hours old. Rover could have followed one as many days old.

"Good old Rover," Marian murmured, "good old Rover, a white man's dog."

All at once a question came to her mind. They had been obliged to go several miles north to pick up the trail. This was due to the movement of the floe. This movement still con-

tinued. It was carrying them still farther to the north. The Diomede Islands, halfway station of the Straits, were small; they offered a goal only two or three miles in length. If they were carried much farther north, would they not miss the islands?

She confided her fears to Phi.

"I thought of that," he smiled. "There is a little danger of that, but not much, I guess. You see, I'll try to time our rate of travel, and figure out as closely as I can when we have covered the eighteen miles that should bring us even with the islands. Then, too, old Rover will be losing the trail about that time. When that bearded friend of yours and his guide leave the floe to go upon the solid shore ice of the islands, the floe is going to keep right on moving north. That breaks the trail, see? When we strike the end of that trail we can go due south and hit the islands. If the air is at all clear, we can see them. It's a clumsy arrangement, but better than going it without a trail."

Marian did "see," but this did not entirely

still the wild beating of her heart as she leaped a yawning chasm between giant up-ended cakes of ice, or felt her way cautiously across a strip of newly-formed ice that bent under her weight as if it were made of rubber.

It was with a strange, wild thrill that she realized they were far out over the conquered sea. Hundreds of feet below was the bed of Bering Straits. Above that bed a wild, swirling current of frigid salt water raced.

Once, as they were about to cross a stretch of new ice, Phi threw himself flat and hacked a hole through the ice. Water bubbled up, while Marian caught the wild surging rush of the current.

For a second her knees trembled, her face blanched. Phi saw and smiled.

"Never fear," he exclaimed; "we'll make it all right. And when you get back home you'll have a story to tell that will make Eliza's crossing on the ice seem like a picnic party crossing a trout stream on stepping-stones."

It was not long after that, however, when

even this daring boy's face sobered. Old Rover, who had been following the trail unhesitatingly, suddenly came to a halt. He turned to the right, sniffing the ice. Then he turned to the left. After that he looked up into the face of the boy, as if to say:

"Where's the trail gone?"

Phi examined the ice carefully.

"Been a sudden jam here," he muttered; "then the ice has slid along, some north, some south. It has all happened since our friends passed this way. You just wait here. I'll take Rover to the north and let him pick up the trail. When I find it, I'll come back far enough to call to you. May be to the south, though, but we'll soon see."

He disappeared around a giant ice-pile and, in a twinkling, was lost to view.

The two girls, placing their burdens of food and Marian's sketches on an up-ended ice-cake, sat down to wait. They were growing weary. The strain of the adventure into this puzzling, unknown ice-field was telling on their nerves.

"I wish we were safe at Cape Prince of Wales," sighed Marian.

"Yes, or even East Cape," said Lucile. "I think I'd be content to stay there and chance the year with the natives."

"Anyway, Phi's doing his best," said Marian. "Isn't he a strange one, though? Do you think he has the blue envelope?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I think he has."

"I don't know," Lucile said sleepily. Fatigue and the keen Arctic air were making her drowsy.

Presently, she leaned back against an ice-cake and fell asleep.

"I'll let her sleep," Marian mused. "It'll give her strength for what comes next, whatever that is."

An hour passed, but no call echoed across the silent white expanse. Marian, now pacing back and forth across a narrow ice-pan, now pausing to listen, felt her anxiety redoubled by every succeeding moment. What could have happened

to Phi? Had some mishap befallen him? Had a slip thrown him into some dangerous crevice? Had thin ice dropped him to sure death in the surging undercurrent? Or had he merely wandered too far and lost his way?

Whatever may have happened, he did not return.

At length, with patience exhausted, she climbed the highest ice-pile and gazed away to the north. The first glance brought forth a cry of dismay. A narrow lane of dark water, stretching from east to west, extended as far as eye could see in each direction. It lay not a quarter of a mile from the spot where she stood.

"He's across and can never recross to us," she moaned in despair. "No creature could brave that undercurrent and live. And there is no other way."

Then, as the full terror of their situation flashed upon her, she sank down in a heap and buried her face in her hands.

They were two lone girls ten miles from any

land, on the bosom of a vast ice-floe, which was slowly but surely creeping toward the unknown northern sea. They had no chart, no compass, no trail to follow and no guide. To move seemed futile, yet to remain where they were meant sure disaster.

As if to complete the tragedy of the whole situation, a snow-fog drifted down upon them. Blotting out the black ribbon of water and every ice-pile that was more than a stone's throw from them, it swept on to the south with a silence that was more appalling than had been the grinding scream of a tidal wave beneath the ice.

"Lucile! Lucile!" she fairly screamed as she came down to the surface of the pan. "Lucile! Wake up! We are lost! He is lost!"

* * * * * * *

What had happened to the young college boy had been this: He had hastened to the north in search of the trail. Rover, with nose close to the ice, had searched diligently for the scent. For a long time his search had been unrewarded,

but at last, with a joyous bark, he sprang away across an ice-pan.

The boy followed him far enough to make sure that he had truly found the trail, then, calling him back, turned to retrace his steps.

Great was his consternation when he discovered the cleavage in the floe. Hopefully he had at first gone east along the channel in search of a possible passage. He found none. After racing for a mile, he turned and retraced his steps to the point where he had first come upon open water. From there he hurried west along the channel. Another twenty minutes was wasted. No possible crossing-place could be found.

He then sat down to think. He thought first of his companions. That they were in a dire plight, he realized well. That they would be able to devise any plan by which they could find their way to any shore, he doubted; yet, as he thought of it, his own position seemed more critical. The trail he had found would now be useless. He was north of the break in the floe. Land lay to the south of it. He had no way to

cross. In such circumstances, the dog with his keen sense of smell, and his compass with its unerring finger, were equally useless.

"Nothing to do but wait," he mumbled, so he sat down patiently to wait.

And, as he waited, the snow-fog settled down over all.

CHAPTER XI

"WITHOUT COMPASS OR GUIDE"

It was with a staggering sense of hopelessness that the two girls on the bosom of the Arctic floe saw the snow-fog settle down.

"It's likely to last for days, and by that time —" Marian's lips refused to frame the words that expressed their condition when the snow-fog lifted.

"By that time —" echoed Lucile. "But no, we must do something. Surely, there is some way!"

"Without compass or guide?" Marian smiled at the impossibility of there being a solution.

Unconsciously, she had repeated the first line of an old song. Lucile said over the verse:

"Without compass or guide.
On the crest of the tide.
Oh! Light of the stars,
Pray pilot me home."

Involuntarily, her glance stole skyward. Instantly an exclamation escaped her lips:

"Oh, Marian! We can see them! We can! We can!"

"What can we see?" asked Marian.

"The stars!"

It was true. The snow-fog, though spread over the vast surface of the ice, was shallow. The stars gleamed through it as if there were no fog at all.

Wildly their hearts beat now with hope.

"If we can locate the big dipper," said Lucile, whose astronomical research had been of a practical sort, "we can follow the line made by the two stars at the lower edge of the dipper and find the North Star. All we have to do then is to let the North Star guide us home."

This was quickly done. And in a short while they had mapped out a course for themselves which would certainly come nearer bringing them to the desired haven than would the northward drift of the ice-floe.

"But Phi?" exclaimed Lucile.

Marian stood for a moment undecided. Should they leave this spot without him? She believed he would make a faithful attempt to rejoin them. What if they were gone when he came? Suddenly she laughed.

"Rover!" she exclaimed. "He can follow our trail. If Phi comes, he will have only to follow us. He can travel faster than we shall. He may catch up with us."

So with many a backward glance at the gleaming North Star, the two girls set their course south by east, a course which in time should bring them in the vicinity of the Diomede Islands.

In their minds, however, were many questions. Would further tide-cracks impede their progress? Would the snow-fog continue? If it did, would they ever be able to locate the two tiny islands which were, after all, mere rocky pillars jutting from a sea of ice?

* * * * * * *

Phi did not sit long on the ice-pile under the snow-fog. He was born for action. Something

must be done. Quickly he was on the run.

As he rushed back over the way in which he had come, something caught his eye.

An immense ice-pan had been up-ended by the press of the drift. It had toppled half over and lodged across the edge of a smaller cake. Now, like an ancient drawbridge, it hung suspended over the black moat of the salt water channel.

The boy's quick eye had detected a very slight movement downward. As he remembered it now, the cake had made a far more obtuse angle with the surface of the pool a half-hour before than it did now.

Was there hope in this? Hastily he arranged three bits of ice in one pile, then two in another. By dropping on his stomach and squinting across these, he could just see the tip of the up-ended cake. If it were in motion the tip would soon disappear. Eagerly he strained his eyes for a few seconds. Then, in disgust, he closed his eyes. The cake did not seem to move.

For some time he lay there in deep thought.

He was searching in his mind for a way out.

After a while he opened his eyes. More from curiosity than hope, he squinted once more along the line. Then, with a wild shout, he sprang into the air. The natural drawbridge was falling. Its point had dropped out of line.

The shout died on his lips. His eyes had warned him that the channel of water was widening. If it widened too rapidly, if the drawbridge fell too slowly, or ceased to fall at all, hope would die.

Moment by moment he measured the two distances with his eye. Rover, sitting by his side, now and again peered up into his eyes as if to say: "What's it all about?"

Now the drawbridge took a sudden drop of a foot. Hope rose. Then, again, it appeared wedged solidly in place. It did not move. The channel widened a foot, two feet, three. Hope seemed vain.

But now came a sudden tide tremor across the floe. With a crunching sound the massive cake toppled and fell.

The boy was on his feet in an instant. The chasm was bridged. But the cake had broken in two. Could he make it?

Calling to his dog, he leaped upon the slippery surface. An ever-widening river of water flowed where the cake had split. With one wild bound, he cleared it. The dog followed. In another moment they were safe on the other side.

"That's well over with," the boy sighed, patting the old dog on the head. "Now the question is, how can we find our friends?"

That, indeed, was a problem. They had covered considerable ground. The ice had been shifting. To pick up their back trail seemed impossible. An hour's search convinced him that it could not be done. He sat down in a brown study. He could not go away and leave these girls to drift north and perish, yet further search seemed futile.

Just as he was about to despair, Rover began to bark in the distance. Following the sound, he came to where the dog was apparently barking

at nothing. But as the boy approached, the dog shot away over the ice.

"A trail!" he muttered, following on.

The ice was hard and smooth. A soft skin "muckluck" would leave no mark. Even the hard toes of a white bear would not scratch it.

When the boy had followed for a half-hour, he thought of these things, and paused to consider. What if he were following the meandering trail of a lumbering white bear? And if it happened to be a trail of a human being, was it his own trail, that of the girls, or of the bearded miner and his guide?

His compass would tell something. Studying his compass then, he walked forward slowly.

Fifteen minutes of this told him that this was no white bear's trail. It went too straight ahead for that. Neither could it be his own trail, for he would have come to a sudden turn before this. One thing more was certain: The person or persons who made this trail were headed due south by east. They would, if they did not change their course, in time reach the vicinity

of the Diomede Islands. Were they his friends, or the unfaithful guide and his party? This he could not tell.

After a few moments' reflection he decided that there remained but one thing for him to do: to follow this trail.

"All right, old dog," he said, "let's see where this ends, and who's at the end. Might be an Eskimo hunter who has wandered far on the ice-floe, for all I know; but he'll end up sometime."

Moment by moment the scent of the trail they followed grew fresher. He could tell this by the old dog's growing eagerness. At every ice-pile they rounded, he expected to catch sight of human figures. Would it be two men or two girls? He could not tell. Not a chance footprint in soft snow had caught his eye.

When he had fairly given up hope of overtaking them, as he speeded around a gigantic ice-pile he came at once in sight of those he followed. So overjoyed was he at sight of human beings that, before determining their identity, he shouted cheerily:

"Hey, there!"

The figure nearest him wheeled in his track. Then, with the fierce growl of a beast, he sprang at the boy's throat.

So taken by surprise was Phi that he made no defense. He caught a vision of a pair of fiery eyes set in a mass of shaggy hair; the next instant he felt himself crashed to the hard surface of the ice.

The advantage was all with the man. Larger, stronger, older, with the handicap of the aggressor, he bade fare to finish his work quickly.

The native guide had passed beyond the next ice-pile. Rover had followed.

But the boy's college days had not been for naught; he knew a trick or two. As if stunned by the fall, he relaxed and lay motionless. Seeing this, the man took time to plant his knees on the boy's chest before moving his horny hands toward his throat.

The next instant, as if thrown by a springboard, the man flew into the air. Phi sprang to his feet, his one thought of escape. Turning, he

dashed around an ice-pile, then another and another. But fate was not with him. Just at the moment when he felt that he could elude his pursuer, his foot struck a crevice in the ice, and he went sprawling. Again the wild terror was upon him.

But this time there came tearing over the ice a new wild terror, and this one his friend. Old Rover, silent and determined, sprang clean at the man's throat. The assailant went down, striking out with hands and feet, and roaring for mercy.

Phi dragged the dog off. "Get!" he said. The man looked surly, but one look at the determined boy and the eager jaws of the dog set him slouching away.

"You're some dog!" the boy laughed at the old leader. "Well, now, I'll say you are!"

CHAPTER XII

"WHAT IS THAT?"

When the man had gone, Phi sat down upon an up-ended ice-cake to rest and think. His logical course was evident enough; to wait for perhaps half an hour, allowing the man, who would doubtless be able to overtake his guide, to get a sufficient distance ahead to prevent any further unpleasant encounters. Still, he was glad now to have his rifle, small as it was. He had brought only a few cartridges for it, as they were an added weight. These had been spilled from his pocket in the scuffle, but by a diligent search he was able to find five. He was about to abandon the search when, with an exclamation of astonishment, he sprang forward, and bending, picked up an envelope.

"The blue envelope," he exclaimed. "My blue envelope. He must be the bearded miner

the girls told me about. It was lucky he tried to assassinate me after all."

The envelope had been torn open, but the letter, though blurred with grime and dirt, was still in it. With eager fingers he pulled it out.

" Couldn't read our cipher, so he was going to Nome for help, I reckon," he muttered. " All I've got to say is, it's lucky he lost it and I found it."

He read the missive hastily, then a light of hope shone in his eye.

" If only I can make it back to the American shore," he exulted. " Rover, old boy, get back on your job. We're going to the islands."

Hopefully he hurried forward. But they had tarried too long, for, not a hundred rods from their starting point, they came upon a broad, dark break in the floe, such a break as no drawbridge of ice would ever span.

" And, like the other, it's endless," Phi groaned as his eye swept the line from left to right and from right to left again; then he sat down to think.

A half hour before this Lucile had said to Marian: "Listen, I think I hear a dog bark."

They listened and the bark came to them very distinctly.

"Is it Rover, or does it come from the island?" asked Lucile.

"I can't tell," whispered Marian.

For some time they listened. When at last they prepared to resume their journey, Lucile glanced upward again. Then a cry of consternation escaped her lips; the fog had thickened; the stars were lost to them. They were again adrift on the trackless floe without compass or guide.

At the moment when Phi sat down to think, they were just coming in sight of that same break in the floe, on the side of which he sat. They were not a mile apart, but the distance had as well been a hundred miles as, in this labyrinth of ice-floes, no person finds another, and, as it turned out later, Phi took the trail to the left and they the one to the right.

Why the two girls chose to travel to the right

along the break, they could not have told, nor why they traveled at all, unless because motion quieted their nerves and served to allay their fears. Perhaps there was something of Providence in it. Certainly it did bring them a bit of good fortune.

Lucile had rounded a gigantic ice-pile when suddenly she gripped Marian's arm.

" What's this? " she exclaimed.

A brown object lay some distance ahead of them. With bated breaths they crept cautiously forward; it might be a white bear or walrus.

Suddenly Marian threw up her head and laughed. " It's only a kiak. Some Eskimo has left it on the ice and the floe has carried it away."

" May be a valuable find. Let's hurry," exclaimed Lucile.

Breaking into a run, they soon reached its side.

" Let's explore it! " whispered Marian. " You take the forecastle and I'll take the after-cabin," she laughed, as she thrust her arm into

the open space toward the stern of the kiak.

"Why, there is something there!" she exclaimed.

"Something here, too!" answered Lucile excitedly, as her slender white hand tugged away at a bundle which had been thrust into the prow of the boat.

"It's like going through your stocking Christmas morning!" laughed Marian, for the moment quite forgetting their dilemma in the excitement of discovery.

Marian drew forth a large sealskin sack. It was heavy and was tied tightly at the mouth. It gave forth a strange plop as she turned it over.

"Some sort of liquid," she announced. "Probably seal-oil."

With difficulty she untied the strings and opened the sack. Then quickly she pinched her nose. "Whew! What a smell!"

"Let's see," said Lucile, dropping the bundle she had just dragged forth. "Yes, it's seal-oil. That's a good find."

" Why? We can't use that stuff. It must be at least a year old and rotten. Talk about limburger cheese! Whew! "

She quickly tied the sack up again.

" Well," said Lucile, " we probably won't want to use it for food, but white people as fine-blooded as we have been compelled to. It's better than starving. But I was thinking about a fire. If we ever find any fuel where we're going — wherever that is — " she smiled a trifle uncertainly, " we'll need some oil to help start the fire if the fuel is damp, as most driftwood is."

" Driftwood? When do we go ashore? " laughed Marian.

" It's well to be prepared for anything," smiled Lucile. " Let's see what's in my prize package."

Marian leaned forward eagerly while Lucile untied a leather thong.

" Deerskins! " she cried exultantly. " Four of them! Enough for a sleeping-bag! And wrapped in a sealskin square which will protect us from the damp. I believe," she said thought-

fully, "that this native must have been planning a little trip up the coast, and if he was there must be other useful things in our ark, for an Eskimo never ventures far without being prepared for every emergency."

Once more they bent over the kiak, each one to search her corner.

"Another sack!" cried Lucile; "a hunting sack, with matches wrapped in oiled sealskin, a butcher knife, some skin-rope, a pair of boola balls with the strings, a fish line with hook and sinker; two big needles stuck in a bit of canvas. That's about all, but it's a lot."

'I've found a little circular wooden box," said Marian. "More food, I guess; probably the kind you can't eat without gagging. No," she cried, after a moment, "here's a big square of tea — the Russian kind, all pressed hard into a brick. There's enough for a dozen tea parties. Oh, joy! here are three pilot biscuits!"

"Pilot biscuits!" Lucile danced about on the ice.

These large brown disks of hardtack, so often

despised, would not have been half so welcome had they been solid gold.

" Well, I guess that's about all," but Marian smiled. " I'm hungry already, but we daren't eat anything yet. We'll save these and eat the deer meat first that we brought along."

" We'll be pretty awful hungry, I am afraid," said Lucile, "before we leave the ocean. But what worries me just now is a drink. Do you suppose we could find an ice-pool of fresh water? "

A short search found them the desired pool, and each drank to her heart's content. They then sat down upon the top of the kiak for a brief consultation. After talking matters over they decided that the best thing they could do was to remain by the kiak until the fog cleared. It was true that the kiak, carefully managed, would carry them across the break in the floe, but, once across, they would be no better off than before, since they had no way of determining directions. Furthermore, neither of them had ever handled a kiak and they knew all too

well what a spill meant in that stinging water.

"Guess we'd better stick right here," said Marian, and Lucile agreed.

"Now," suggested Lucile, "we'll put your middy on a paddle and set it up as a sign of distress; then, since the ice isn't piling, I think we might both sleep a little while."

The flag was soon hoisted, and the girls, with the sealskin square beneath them, lay down under the deerskins and attempted to sleep. But the deerskins were not large enough to cover them, and kept sliding off. They were chilled through and sleep was impossible.

"Lucile," said Marian at last, "I believe we could set the kiak up and bank it solidly into place, then creep into it and sleep there."

"We might," said Lucile doubtfully.

The kiak was soon set, and, after many doublings and twistings, with much laughter they managed to slide down into it, and there, with two of the deerskins for a mattress and two for covers, they at last fell asleep in one another's arms, as peacefully as children in a trundle-bed.

" Oh, Marian, you're too — too chubby! " Lucile laughed, as she attempted to struggle from the bean-pod-like bed, after they had slept for some time.

Their first glance at the break in the floe told them it had widened rather than narrowed. A look skyward showed them that the fog too had thickened. Lucile's brow wrinkled; her eyes were downcast.

" Cheer up! " said Marian. " You can never tell what will happen. Things change rapidly in this Arctic world. We'd better explore our ice-floe, hadn't we? And don't you think we could eat a bit before we go? "

Cheered by the very thought of something to be done, Lucile munched her half of the pilot biscuit and bit of reindeer meat contentedly.

Then, after they had seen to it that their white middy flag was properly fastened, for this must act as a guide back to camp, they prepared to go exploring.

Armed with the butcher knife, Lucile led the way. Marian carried the fishing tackle, and

about her waist were wound the strings of the boola ball.

"Quite some hunters," laughed Marian. "Regular Robinson Crusoettes!"

Several wide circles of the camp revealed nothing but ice, the whiteness of which was relieved here and there by spots of water, black as night.

"Might be fish in them," suggested Marian.

"Yes, but you couldn't catch them. You can only catch tomcod through a hole in the ice."

They were becoming tired, and had spoken of turning back, when Marian whispered:

"Down!"

She pulled her companion into the dark side of an ice-pile.

A shadow had passed over the ice. Now it passed again, and Lucile, looking up, saw a small flock of ducks circling for a pool of water not twenty yards away.

"Wha — what's the idea?" she whispered.

"Boola balls. Maybe we can catch one. They come from the north; not easily scared."

" Can you — "

" Yes, my brother showed me how to handle the boola balls. You whirl them about your head a few times, then you let them go. If the string strikes a duck's neck, it winds all about it; then the duck can't fly."

With eager fingers Marian straightened out the twelve feet of double-strand leather thong.

" There! There! They're down! " whispered Lucile.

" You stay here. If they rise and fly away, call me."

Creeping around two piles of ice, Marian threw herself flat and began to crawl the remaining distance across a flat pan of ice. Her heart was beating wildly, for in her veins there flowed a strain of the hunter's blood of her Briton ancestors of many generations back.

Now she was forty feet away, now twenty, now ten, and the ducks had not flown. Stretching out the thong, she rose on an elbow and set the balls whirling over her head. Once, twice, three times, then up she sprang and with one

more whirl sent the string singing through the air.

The young ducks, craning their necks with curiosity, did not move until something came crashing at them, and a wildly frantic girl sprang toward them.

To the duck about whose neck the string had encircled, this move was too late, for Marian was upon him. And a moment later, looking very much like the old woman who went to market, with a dead gray duck dangling from her right arm, Marian returned in triumph.

"Oh, Lucile," she cried, "I got him! I got him!"

"Fine! You shall have a medal," said Lucile.

"But how *will* we cook him?"

"Well," said Lucile, after a moment's thought, "it's growing colder; going to freeze hard. They say freezing meat is almost as good as cooking it. I don't know —"

"Look!" cried Marian suddenly, balancing herself at the crest of a high pile of ice. "What's all that black a little way over there to

the left? It's not like ice. Do you suppose it could be an island? "

" Is the ice piling there? " Lucile asked, clinging to her friend's side. " No, it isn't, so it can't be an island, for the island would stop the ice as it flows and make it pile up."

" But what can it be? "

" We can't go over there, for we can't see our flag from there."

" Yes, we can," said Marian. " I'll take off my petticoat and put it on this ice-pile. We can see it from there, and when we get back here we can see the flag."

This new beacon was soon established. Then, with trembling and eager footsteps, the girls hastened to what appeared to be an oasis in a desert of ice.

CHAPTER XIII

STRANGE DISCOVERIES

It was a strange sight that met the eyes of the two girls as they paused halfway to the dark patch on the surface of the ice which loomed like a giant's shadow in the snow-fog. With eager feet they dashed on, leaping narrow chasms and stumbling over ice barriers in their mad rush.

The revelation which came as they rounded the last pile of ice was both a surprise and a disappointment. Great heaps of ashes, piles of bottles and tin cans, frozen masses of garbage; junk of every description, from a rusty tin dipper to a discarded steel range, met their eyes.

"It's a graveyard," murmured Marian, "a graveyard of things people don't want."

"That some people didn't want!" corrected the more practical Lucile. "Marian, we're rich!"

"Rich?" Marian stared.

"Why, yes! Don't you see? There's an old clothes wringer; that's got a lot of wood in it. And there's an old paper bucket. That'll burn. There's a lot of things like that. It won't take any time at all to get enough wood to cook our duck!"

"A fire! A fire!" exclaimed Marian, jumping up and down in a wild dance. Then, seized with Lucile's spell of practical philosophy, she grasped a rusty tin kettle.

"We can cook it in this. There's a hole in it, but we can draw a cloth into that, and we can scour it up with ashes."

The next few minutes echoed with glad exclamations: "Here's an old fork!" "Here's half a sack of salt!" "Here are two rusty spoons!" "Here's a broiler," and so it went on.

One would have believed they were in the greatest department store in the land, with the privilege of carrying away anything that would fit in their kitchen and that suited their fancy. Truth was, they were rummaging over the city

of Nome's vast garbage pile. That garbage pile had been accumulated during the previous year, and was, at this time, several hundred miles from the city. During the long nine months of winter the water about Nome is frozen solid some two miles out to sea. All garbage and junk is hauled out upon the ice with dog-teams and dumped there. When spring comes the ice loosens from the shore, and, laden with its great cargo of unwanted things, carries it through Bering Straits to haunt the Arctic Ocean, perhaps for years to come. It is moved hither and yon until time and tide and many storms have at last ground it into oblivion.

The long Arctic twilight had begun to fall when the two girls, hungry and weary, but happily laden with many treasures which were to make life more possible on their floating palace of ice, made their way toward their camp.

Besides scraps of wood enough for two or three small fires, and cooking utensils of various sorts, they had found salt, a part of a box of pepper, and six cans of condensed milk which

had doubtless been frozen several times but had never been opened.

"We could live a week," said Lucile exultantly, "even if we didn't have another bit of good luck."

"Yes-s," said Marian slowly, "but let's hope we don't have to; I'm afraid I'd get awful hungry."

They dined that night, quite happily, on a third of their duck, soup made of duck's broth and condensed milk, and half of a pilot biscuit.

"Oh, Marian," said Lucile, as she thought of sleep, "that kiak's so crowded when we sleep there."

"Yes-s," said Marian, thoughtfully, "it is. I wonder if we couldn't make a sleeping-bag?"

At once needles and some sinew thread found in the native's hunting bag were gotten out, the four deerskins were spread out, two on the bottom and two on top, with the fur side inside, and they went to work with a will to fashion a rude sleeping-bag.

Their fingers shook with the chill wind that

swept across the ice and their eyelids drooped often in sleep, yet they persevered and at last the thing was complete.

"Are you sure it won't be cold?" said Lucile, who had never slept in a sleeping-bag.

"Oh, no, I know it won't," Marian assured her. "I've heard my father tell of spreading his on the frozen ground when it was thirty below zero, and sleeping snug as a 'possum in a hollow tree."

"All right; let's try it," and Lucile spread the bag on the sealskin square.

After removing their skirts and rolling them up for pillows, together they slid down into the soft, warm depths of their Arctic bed.

"Um-m," whispered Marian.

"Um-m," Lucile answered back. And the next moment they were both fast asleep.

All through the night they slept there with the Great Dipper circling around the North Star above them, and with the ice-floe carrying them, who could tell where?

The two following days were spent in fruit-

less hunting for wild duck and in making trips to the rubbish pile. These trips netted nothing of use save armfuls of wood which helped to add a cheery tone to their camp. Though the fog held on, the nights grew bitterly cold. They were glad enough to creep into their sleeping-bag as soon as it grew dark. There for hours they lay and talked of many things: Of the land to which the ice-floe might eventually bring them, the people who would be living there, and the things they would have to eat. Then, again, they would talk of school days, and the glad, good times that now seemed so far away. Of one subject they never spoke; never once did one wonder to the other what their families were doing in their far-away homes. They did not dare. It would have been like singing "Home Sweet Home" to the American soldiers on the fields of France.

The second day's tramp to the rubbish pile brought them a great surprise. They were busily searching through the piles of cans for a possible one that had not been opened, when

Lucile, happening to hear a noise behind her, looked up. The next instant, with a startled whisper, which was almost a cry, "Marian! Quick!" she seized Marian by the arm and dragged her around an ice-pile.

"Wha — what is it?" whispered the startled Marian.

"Bear!"

* * * * * * *

At this very moment, on another section of that same vast floe, Phi lay flat on his stomach, his eye traveling the length of his rifle barrel. His brow was wrinkled. He moved uneasily, as a gambler moves who would risk all on one throw of the dice but does not quite dare.

He shook the benumbed fingers of his right hand, then gripped the rifle once more. His forefinger was on the trigger. He had arrived at a crisis. He was half starved and freezing. For three days now he had wandered over the vast expanse of ice-pans that covered the waters of Bering Straits. During that three days he had secured only two small birds, dovekies they

were, birds who linger all winter in the Arctic. These he had shared with Rover.

From the moment the snow-fog had settled down upon him and the break in the ice-floe had blocked his way so effectively, he had wandered about without knowing where he was going. The ice-floe constantly drifting, first this way, then that, may have carried him east, west, north, south. Who could tell where? Who could guess his position on the surface of the ocean at the present moment?

A brown seal was the cause of his excitement now. The seal, lying asleep upon the ice-pan before him, must weigh something like seventy pounds. This was meat enough to last him and his dog many days.

He was not a good shot and knew it. He had wandered over the ice-floes of the ocean at times with a rifle under his arm, yet never before had he stalked a seal. Only the grimmest necessity could have induced him to do so now. There was something altogether too human in those bobbing brown heads as they appeared above the

water or lifted to gaze about them on the ice. But now his need and the need of the dog demanded prompt action.

Two things made a perfect shot a necessity: The seal was sleeping beside his hole; if he was not killed instantly he would drop into the hole and be lost to the hunter. And this was the last cartridge in the rifle. The two birds had cost him four shots. The seal must be secured by his last one. There seemed a certain irony about a fate which would allow him to waste his ammunition on small birds, then offer him such a prize as this with only one shot to win.

He knew well enough how to stalk a seal; he had watched the Eskimos do it many times. Lying flat on your stomach, you cautiously creep forward. Every moment or two you bob your head up and down in imitation of a seal awakened and looking about. If your seal is awake, since his eyesight is poor he will take you for a member of his own species and will go back to sleep again.

Knowing all this, Phi had dragged himself a

hundred feet across the ice, without disturbing the seal. Only fifty feet remained, yet to his feverish brain this seemed too great a distance. Seeing his seal bobbing his head, he bobbed in turn, then, when the seal had dozed off again, continued his crawl.

He had made another six yards when, with a sudden resolve, he slid the rifle forward, lifted it to position, glanced steadily along its barrel, then pulled the trigger.

There followed a metallic snap, then a splash, The rifle had missed fire; the seal had dropped into its pool.

For a moment the boy lay there motionless, stunned by the realization that he was still without food and was now powerless to procure any.

"Well, anyway it was luck for the seal," he smiled uncertainly. "It sure was his lucky day!"

Rising unsteadily, he put two fingers to his mouth and uttered a shrill whistle. From behind a towering ice pile, Rover, gaunt and miserable yet unmistakably a white man's dog, and, by his

bearing, a one time leader of the team, came limping toward him.

"Well," the boy said, patting the dog, "it's hard luck, but we don't eat. It's harder for you than for me, for you are old and I'm young, but somehow — somehow, we'll have to manage. If only we knew. If only — "

He stopped abruptly and his eyes opened wide. Off to the left of them, like a giant fist thrust through the fog, there had appeared the dark bulk of a granite cliff.

"Land, Rover, land!" he muttered hoarsely.

The next moment, utterly overcome with excitement, he sank weakly to the surface of the ice-pan.

"This won't do," he said cheerily, after a brief period of rest. "Rover, old boy, we must be traveling. If the ice is crowding that shore, which it must be from the feel of the wind, there's a chance for us yet."

CHAPTER XIV

A LONESOME ISLAND

After fleeing from the great white bear, the two girls crouched behind the ice pile with bated breath. Expecting at any moment to see the long neck of the gigantic beast thrust around the corner of the ice pile, they longed to flee, yet, not daring, remained crouching there.

"Do you think he saw us?" Marian whispered.

"No. He was snuffing around looking for something to eat."

Marian shivered.

Lucile worked her way about the ice-pile to a point where she could see through a crack between cakes, then she motioned Marian to join her. Together they watched the antics of the clumsy white bear.

"My! Isn't it huge!" whispered Marian.

For a time the bear amused himself by knock-

ing rusty ten-gallon gasoline cans about. At last, seeming to scent something, he began tearing up a particular garbage pile. Presently a huge rat ran out and went scurrying away. There followed a lively chase which ended in a prolonged squeal.

"He got him!" Marian shivered.

The bear had moved out of their view. Cautiously, they turned and made their way from ice-pile to ice-pile, from the rubbish heap toward camp.

"I hope he doesn't get our scent and follow us," said Lucile. "They don't usually bother people much, though."

In spite of her belief that the bear would not harm them, Lucile did not sleep well that night. "You can never tell what a hungry bear might do," she kept saying over and over to herself.

At last, late in the night, she fell asleep and slept soundly until morning. When finally she did awake, it was with the feeling that somehow something had changed.

"Land! Land!" something seemed to be whis-

pering to her. It could have been nothing short of intuition which gave her this suggestion. They had been riding on the surface of a gigantic ice-floe. It was, perhaps, twenty miles wide by a hundred long. There was no sense of motion. So silent was its sweep, one might imagine oneself to be upon land; yet, as she crept quickly out of her sleeping-bag, she saw at once that the motion of the floe was arrested and off to the right she read the reason. A narrow stretch of rocky shore there cast back the first rays of the morning sun.

"Marian! Marian!" she called excitedly. "Land! Land! An island!"

There could be no questioning this great good fortune. The one remaining problem was to reach the shore of that island. They did not dare to abandon their kiak, sleeping-bag, and scanty supplies, for who could tell them that this was not a small uninhabited island? They had traveled many miles with the ice-floe in some direction, perhaps many directions. Who could say where they were now?

"The ice must be piling close to shore," said Lucile, "but we must try it. It's our only chance."

After a hasty breakfast of tea and a last remaining bit of cold duck, they piled all their supplies and equipment into the kiak, then, bidding farewell to the humble ice-pan which had given them such a long ride, they began dragging the kiak toward the island.

This proved a long and tedious task, requiring all the skill and strength they possessed, for the island, though scarcely four miles in length, had appeared to be much closer than it really was. The ice-piles, too, grew rougher and more uneven as they advanced. When they neared the shore, they found themselves in infinite peril, for the ice was piling. Here a huge cake a hundred feet across and eight feet thick glided without a sound, up — up, into mid-air, at last to crumble and fall; and here a mass of small cakes were thrown into convulsions.

Pick their way as they might with greatest care, they were more than once in danger of

being crushed by overhanging ice-pans, or of being plunged into a dark pool of water.

When, at length, in triumph, they dragged their kiak to a rocky shelf well above the trembling ice, Marian, from sheer exhaustion, threw herself flat upon the rock and lay there motionless for some time. Lucile sat beside her absorbed in thought.

At last Marian sat up. "Well, we're here," she smiled, giving her blistered hands a woeful look.

"Yes," smiled Lucile, "we're here. Now where is 'here' and what's it like?"

The two girls looked at one another solemnly for a full minute. In their larder was still a little tea, a pint bottle of weak duck soup, a half-can of much frozen condensed milk — and that was all. They were on an island of which as yet they knew nothing. Above them towered great, overhanging cliffs. Before them the giant ice-pans rose, crumbling and creaking in mad turmoil.

"Life is so strange," said Lucile, at length;

then energetically: "Let's make some soup of the things we have left. Then, if we can get up there, we'll explore our island. We'll have three or four hours of daylight left, and if there's anything for us to eat anywhere, the sooner we find it out the better."

The climb to the top of the island, which they undertook an hour later, was scarcely less dangerous than had been the struggle to cross the tumbling ice-floe, for this island was little more than a gigantic granite bowlder rising for a distance of some five hundred feet out of the sea.

They crept along a narrow shelf where a slip on some pebble might send them crashing to death in the tumbled mass of ice below. They scaled an all but perpendicular wall, to drag their sleeping-bag and the few other belongings, which they had dared attempt to carry, after them by the aid of a skin-rope. Then, after a few minutes' rest, they would rise to climb again.

But at last, their efforts rewarded, they found

themselves standing on the edge of a snow-capped plateau. "Now," said Lucile, "if there are any people living on the island, it won't be on top of it, but in some sheltered cranny down by the shore where they are away from the sweeping winds and where they can hunt and fish."

"But think what they may be like!" said Marian. "They may be savages who have never seen a white man. We don't even know whether we are a hundred miles from Bering Straits or five hundred. And neither of us has ever been on an island in the Arctic Ocean!"

"That," said Lucile, "has nothing to do with it. We're on one now. We can't very well go back to the ocean ice. We haven't any food. We couldn't hide on this little island if we wished to. So the best thing to do is to try to find the people, if there are any, and cast our lot with them. I once heard a great bishop say that 'humanity is everywhere very much the same.' We've just got to believe that and go ahead."

Shouldering the sleeping-bag, and leaving to

Marian the remaining seal-oil in the skin-sack, the butcher knife, and the fishing outfit, she marched steadily forward on a course which in time would enable them to make the outer circle of the island.

"See those piles of stones?" Lucile said fifteen minutes later. "Those did not just happen to be there. They were put there by men. See how carefully they are piled. The piles look tall and slim. I have heard a sea captain say that the natives of this coast, in very early days, when there was warring among tribes, piled stones on high points like this to make those who desired to attack them think they were men, and that there were many warriors in the place."

"Then," said Marian, catching her breath at the thought, "there must be people on this island."

"Not for sure," said Lucile. "The people who piled up those rocks might merely have been living here temporarily, using this island as a hunting station; and then, even if they were living here permanently, famine and contagious

diseases may have killed all of them off."

They trudged on again in silence. Everywhere the rocky rim of the island frowned up at them, offering no suggestion of a path down to the foot, or of a rocky shelf below where a group of hunters might build a village.

"There's a place somewhere." said Lucile stoutly, as she lowered her burden to the snow and paused for a brief rest. "There's a path down and we must find it, if it's nothing more than to find a safe spot by the sea where we can fish for smelt, tomcod and flounders."

Dusk was falling when, at length, with a little cry of joy, Lucile sprang forward, then began a cautious descent over a winding and apparently well-worn trail which even the snow did not completely conceal.

With hearts beating wildly, in utter silence they made their way down, down the winding way — to what? That, they could not tell.

Finally Lucile paused. She caught her breath quickly and clutched at her throat.

At length, in a calmer moment, she pointed

down and to the right of the trail.

"See that square of white?"

Marian strained her eyes to peer through the gathering darkness.

"Yes," she said at last, "I see it."

"That," said Lucile in a tone that was tense with emotion, "is the roof of a house — a white man's house!"

"Wha — what makes you think so?" gasped Marian.

"There's nothing as square as that in nature's panorama. And a native does not build a house like that."

"And if it is?"

"If it is, we must trust ourselves to their care, though I'd almost rather they were natives." She closed her eyes and saw again the rough, unkempt white men, beach combers, who lived by trading, hunting and whaling with the natives. They were a hard, bad lot, and she knew it.

"Well," she sighed, "come on. Let's go down."

Down they went, each turn of the path bringing them closer to the mysterious house.

"There's no light," said Lucile at last.

"There are no tracks in the snow," added Marian, a moment later.

"It's boarded up," said Lucile, as they came closer. It would have been hard to judge whether there was more of relief or of disappointment in the tone in which she said this.

They stood there staring at the house. It was a nice house, a bungalow such as one might desire for a summer home in the mountains or at the seashore.

"Who do you suppose brought all that fine lumber up here and built that house?" said Lucile.

"I wonder who," echoed Marian.

They took a turn about it. All the windows had been boarded up with rough lumber. There were two doors. These were fastened with padlock and chain. An examination of the locks showed that keys had not been used in them for months.

Lucile's eyes were caught by poles and some platforms to the right, along the rocky shore. She walked in that direction.

"Marian, come here!" she cried presently. Marian came running. "Look! Here's a whole native village! They've built their homes out of rocks. See! It's like tunneling into the side of the mountain. Must be homes for a hundred people!"

"And not a soul here! How strange!"

"Not even a dog!" Lucile's own voice sounded strangely hollow to her, as if echoed by the walls of a tomb.

CHAPTER XV

TWO RED RIDING HOODS

Before Phi struck out for the unknown land which had so suddenly thrust itself into his line of vision, he paused to ask himself the question whether he had come upon some island or a point on the mainland. Finding himself unable to answer the question, he at once set plans for reaching that land.

The rifle, now a useless incumbrance, he left leaning against an up-ended cake of ice. That shore, if not lifted high by a mirage, was at least ten miles away. And ten miles to a boy and dog who have appeased their hunger for three days with two small birds, is no mean distance.

Bravely they struck out. Now they crossed a broad, level pan and now climbed a gigantic pile of bowlder-like fragments that rolled and slipped at their every move, threatening to send them crashing to the surface of the ice-pans or to

submerge them in the deep, open pool of stinging water that lay at its base.

Exercising every precaution, the boy made his way slowly forward. More than once he paused to wait for the dog, time after time lifting him over a dangerous crevice or assisting him in climbing a particularly difficult barrier.

"I know you'd help me if you could," he said with a smile as he moistened his cracked lips, "so if we go down, we go together."

Time after time, dizzy-headed and faint, he sat down to rest, only to rise after a moment and struggle on again. At times, too, he was obliged to shake himself free from the spells of drowsiness which the chill wind and brisk Arctic air threw over him.

"We — we'll make it, old boy. We — we'll make it," he repeated over and over.

Little by little the landscape broadened before them. The bit of rugged shore line which lay there like a vision might be a point of land on the continent of North America or of Asia. Then again it might be the side of an island.

Phi thought of this in a vague sort of way. His chief desire to put foot once more on something that did not drift with wind and tide, he bent every effort to making the goal.

At last, after what seemed days of struggle, he stood within a quarter of a mile of the shore.

The ice was piling on that shore, a scene of disordered grandeur beyond description. It was as if the streets of a city, six or eight feet in thickness and solid as marble, should suddenly begin to rise, to buckle, to glide length upon length in wild confusion. For some time the boy and the dog stood upon the last broad pan that did not pile and, lost in speechless wonder, viewed that marvel of nature with the eyes of unconcerned spectators.

At last the boy shook himself free from the charm. "Rover," there was awe in his tone, "do you know what we must do? We must cross that and reach that shore before the wind shifts or we are lost."

As if understanding his meaning, the dog lifted his nose in air and song, the dismal song

known only to the sled dog of the Arctic.

"Well — here goes!"

Phi scrambled to the surface of a gliding cake, then, having raced across its surface, leaped a narrow chasm, to race on again. Such an obstacle race had never before been entered into by a boy and a dog. Rover, seeming to have regained some of the spirit of his younger days, followed well. Once, with a dismal howl, he fell into a crevice, but before an ice-pan could rear up and crush him, a strong arm dragged him free.

They had made two-thirds of the distance when, on a broad pan that shuddered as if torn by an earthquake, Phi paused. One glance at the rocky coast brought a sharp exclamation to his lips.

"It's like the wall of a prison," he muttered; "straight up.

"No," he whispered a moment later, "there's a bare chance — that rocky shelf. But it's fifteen feet above the ice, and how's one to reach it? There may be a way. One can but try."

They were off again. Each fresh escape brought them face to face with new and more startling dangers. Here they were lifted in air, to leap away just in time from a crash. Here they crossed a pile of crushed and slivered fragments only to face a dark and yawning pool of salt water waiting to sting them into insensibility. But always there was a way out. Each moment brought them closer to the frowning wall.

A last, close-up survey told the boy that there was no path, no slanting incline, no rugged steps to the shelf above. But from the shelf upward there appeared to be a possible ascent.

At that moment he saw something that made him catch his breath hard. A gigantic ice-pan, measuring hundreds of feet from side to side, had begun to glide upward over a mass of broken fragments toward that cliff.

"It will go as high as the shelf if it hasn't too many seams," he said aloud. "It may go up. And it may crash. But it's our only chance."

He looked at the dog. That the old fellow could make this perilous trip, could mount himself on the very edge of a giant, tilting cake of ice and ride up — up — up, inch by inch and foot by foot, to pause there a breathless distance in mid-air and then at the one critical second, leap to safety on the rocky shelf, the boy did not dream for a moment. Yet he had no thought of leaving Rover behind.

"Come on," he said quietly, "we'll make it somehow, or we'll go down together."

Mounting the tilting monster, they stationed themselves at its very edge and stood there motionless, a boy and a dog in the very midst of one of nature's most stupendous demonstrations of power.

A long minute passed — two — three. They were now ten feet in air; the shelf, a yawning distance still before them, appeared to frown down upon them. To the right of them an ice-pan half the size of the one on which they rode, having come within some ten feet of the wall, broke and crumpled down with a crash.

Still their cake glided on. Now they were fifteen feet from the shelf, now ten. A running jump for the boy would land him safely on the ledge. But there was the dog. There came a creaking grind, a snapping, crashing sound, then silence. The pan had broken in two. Half of it had broken off under the strain. The part on which they rode still stood firm. They were now twenty feet in air. A dark pool of water lay beneath them. The boy gave one glance at the blue heavens and the blinking stars; then, stooping, he picked up the dog and held him in his arms. He stood there like a statue, a magnificent symbol of calm in the midst of all this confusion.

With the ice still gliding upward, holding his breath, as if in fear that the very force of it might send the hundreds of tons crashing to the abyss below, Phi waited the closing of the gap.

Eight feet, seven, six, five, four.

"Now!" he breathed.

His right foot lifted, his left stiffened, his body shot forward.

The next moment there was a sickening crash — the ice-pan had broken in a thousand pieces. But the boy and the dog, saved by a timely leap, lay prone upon the surface of the rocky cliff.

For some time the boy lay sprawled upon the rocky ledge motionless. This last supreme effort had drawn out his last reserve of nervous energy. Amid the shrill scream of grinding ice rising from the tossing mass below, he lay as one whose ears are closed forever to sound.

The dog, with ears dropping, eyes intent, lay watching him. At last his tail wagged gently to and fro — there had been a flutter of motion in the boy's right hand. Meekly the dog crawled forward to lick the glove that covered that hand with his rough tongue. At that the boy raised himself to a sitting position, and, rubbing his eyes, stared about him.

"Rover, old boy," he drawled at last, "that was what you might call a close squeak."

The dog rose and wagged his tail.

"Rover," the boy said solemnly, "I took a long chance for you just then. Why did I do

it? If you'd been the leader of my team for several winters before old age overtook you; if you'd maybe pulled me out of some blizzard where I'd have frozen to death if it hadn't been for your keen sense of smell, which enabled you to follow the trail, there'd have been some sense to it. But you weren't and you didn't; you're only a poor, old, heroic specimen someone has played traitor to and deserted in old age. Well, that's enough of that; we're on land now. What land is it? What are the people like? When do we eat? That last question is most important for the moment. What say we try scaling the cliff and then look about a bit?"

The dog barked his approval. Together they began scaling the cliff, which at times appeared to confront them as an unsurmountable barrier and at others offered a gently rising slope of shale and rock.

* * * * * * *

When Lucile and Marian had made sure that there were no people in the deserted native village, they returned to the mysterious bungalow.

"We've got to get in there," said Marian, "don't matter whose it is."

Searching about, she found a stout pole. With this she pried off a board from a window, then another and another.

"Give me a lift," she said, raising one foot from the ground.

Once boosted up she found that the window was not locked. The sash went up with a surprising bang, and the next instant she was inside and assisting Lucile to enter.

The place had a hollow sound. "Like an old, empty church," said Marian.

Lucile scratched a match. They were in a large room which was absolutely empty. A hasty exploration of the three remaining rooms, which were much smaller, revealed the same state of affairs.

"Now what," said Lucile, knitting her brows in deep thought, "do you think of that?"

"Anyway, it's dry, and not too cold," said Marian.

"But it's empty, and I'm hungry. Say!" she

exclaimed quickly, "you bring in our things; I'll be back."

She bounded out of the window and hurried away toward the native village, which lay silent in the moonlight.

Marian had succeeded in dragging their sleeping-bag and other belongings through the window and was there waiting when Lucile called from outside:

"Here, take this!"

"How heavy!" exclaimed Marian. And a moment later, upon receiving the second object, "How cold!"

"The first," said Lucile, "is a flat, native seal-oil lamp. We can burn our seal-oil in it. I have a handful of moss in my pocket to string along the side for wick. It'll make it more cheery and it'll seem warmer. The other," she went on, "is a frozen whitefish; found it on one of the caches. Guess the natives won't miss it if they come back."

"If they do. But where are they?" asked Marian in a puzzled tone of voice.

"Dead, perhaps. Let's eat," she added abruptly, as Marian shivered.

"But, Lucile, we can't cook the fish."

"Don't have to. Frozen fish is good raw if it's frozen hard enough. I've tried it before. You just shave it off thin like chipped dried beef and gulp it right down before it tastes too fishy."

Marian did not think she would like it, but she found it not half bad.

When they had dined, and had sat by the yellow glow of their seal-oil lamp for a time, they took a good long look at the moon as it shone out over the shimmering whiteness of the sea.

"That," said Marian impressively, "is the same moon that is shining on all our friends wherever they are to-night."

The thought gave them a deal of comfort.

When, in time, their sleeping-bag was spread out on the floor, and they had snuggled comfortably down into its soft depths and were ready to go off into the land of dreams, with their seal-oil lamp still flickering in one corner, Marian

said with a laugh: "Snug as two little Red Riding Hoods."

"Yes, but if the big bear comes home?" murmured Lucile.

"He won't," said Marian with conviction.

But the next moment her faith was shattered. There came a sound from without, and the next instant some heavy object banged against the door.

"What was that?" both exclaimed at once in hoarse whispers.

CHAPTER XVI

A FORTUNATE DISCOVERY

As Phi and his dog reached the top of the cliff and were about to step upon the uneven, snow-covered tableland which lay before them, the boy's eyes chanced to light upon a strange looking brown mass which lay on the rock beneath the shelter of a projecting ledge.

"What do you suppose that is?" he said to the dog, at the same time stepping aside to examine it. "It's a net," he commented. "Too fine for a fish net — must be a bird net. That'd be good luck for us if it were summer. Place must be alive with birds then from the looks of all the deserted nests, but now — now you're no good to us." He kicked the net contemptuously. "Tell us one thing though," he confided to Rover; "there are people on this island, or at least have been. Natives of some kind, they must be, for no white man would have the

patience to make a net of sealskin as fine as that. Question is, were they just camping here to gather eggs or do they live here? If they live here, what kind of people are they? Well, anyway, let's go see."

Wearily he dragged his tired limbs up a gentle slope. Wearily the old dog followed on.

But as they reached the crest the dog became suddenly alert. His ears cocked up, his legs stiff, he sniffed the air.

"What's that, old fellow? Birds? You've a bit of bird dog blood in you. Lots of leaders have, but I guess you're mistaken. Not birds this late in the year."

He moved forward a few feet, then his mouth flew open, but no sound came out. Had he seen a white streak flit across the snow? He had. There was another and another.

Slowly he backed away. Followed reluctantly by the dog, he retreated to the rocky shelf where lay the net.

"We may be able to use you yet," he remarked as he picked up an end of the net. "If

you're not too rotten, you'll serve us a good turn. There are ptarmigan out there. Don't know how many, but enough if we catch them. Ptarmigan are good too," he smiled at the dog, "good as quail and about as plump. Boy, Oh, boy! won't we feast though if only we can catch them? But," he sobered suddenly, "how I'm going to drop both ends of this net at just the right moment is more than I can tell."

The net proved to be in serviceable condition. It was some ten yards by three wide and was of a finely woven mesh. Two ten-foot poles lay farther back under the ledge. One of these was quickly attached to an end of the net, then the net wound upon it. The second stake was fastened to the remaining loose end.

Carrying the net to a level stretch at the top of a ridge, he unrolled it, then for a full five minutes stood studying it. At last he turned thoughtfully to the right and strolled along the net. Suddenly something caught his foot and he sprawled upon the ground.

Rising, he looked at the thing that had tripped

him. Then a light of joy spread over his face.

"Creeping willows!" he exclaimed. "The very thing!"

He spent the next three minutes pulling at long strands of creeping willows. When he had found two long, strong ones, he left them still fast to earth at one end and went for his net. One pole he set on end and proceeded to fasten it there by the aid of the creeping willows, guying it to right and left, as a flag-pole is often braced. He then ran out the length of his net and, having pulled it tight, with the other pole perpendicular, he gave this pole a sudden pull and twist, then threw it to the ground. The net went flat.

"Capital!" he cried. "That will do it."

Having reset his net he took a long, circular route; he came up at last a hundred yards from his fence-like net. The dog had followed meekly at his heels, but now, seeming to sense what was needed, he began rocking back and forth, first to the right, then to the left. Now and then a white spot rose a foot or two above the snow to

soar forward. The boy's eyes snapped. Here was sport that meant life to him and to his dog if they won.

Now they neared the net. His heart beat fast. Suppose the birds should rise and soar away? Then all this work would be lost. But they still ran or fluttered forward.

"Must be eight or ten of them," was his mental comment.

Now they were nearing the net. Veering swiftly to one side, the boy raced to the reclining pole. Lifting it lightly he drew the net to position. So white were the birds that he could scarcely distinguish them from the snow. But, suddenly, he caught a faint shock. A bird in low flight had struck the net. With wildly beating heart, he threw the net to the snow, then went racing down its length.

"One," he exclaimed, fairly beside himself, "two, three, four." Each time he named the count he had drawn a bird from the meshes. At last he was to the end and sank down exhausted. The dog was at his side.

"Rover, old top," he murmured, "four of em; four beauties! We eat, old top! We eat!"

The dog's eyes rolled hungrily, but he did not offer to touch the birds.

With eager, trembling fingers the boy tore the feathers from two of the birds, then tossed to the dog the wings, legs and back, reserving for himself the dark, rich meat of the breasts, a food fit for a king's table. He cut this off in thin strips and spread it upon a hard-packed bank of snow. The thermometer must stand at ten below. The thin strips would soon be frozen solid. They would then be almost as palatable as if they had been cooked.

With a meal in sight, he found his mind becoming more composed. His thoughts wandered back to the question of the nature of the land he had discovered.

Little knowing what lay just before him, he munched the frozen strips of flesh; then, strengthened and enheartened, he began making plans for a night on the newly discovered land.

A freezing wind swept across the plateau. He

must find shelter from this if he was to secure the sleep his tired form demanded. After a search, he found a rocky crevice which, by the aid of some squares of snow cut from a near-by bank, he converted into a three-sided house, with the open side away from the wind. From the sheltered sides of the great rocks that lay tumbled about here and there, he gathered moss by the armful and carrying it to his house, made a thick soft bed for himself and the dog.

His next thought was of a fire. He had no desire to eat more raw meat, besides he was not unmindful of the cheering influence of even a tiny blaze. The ground was everywhere over-run with creeping willows. These he clipped off with his hunting knife and tied in bundles. Some were dry and dead. These he kept in a separate bundle. When he had an armload, he carried them to a spot near the door of the house.

He had no matches, but this did not trouble him. Cutting off a foot of a pole used with the net, he split it in two pieces. One of these

halves he split again and from these smaller pieces he formed the bow and drill of an Eskimo bow-drill. With a tough creeping willow runner for a string to his bow, with dry moss for tinder, he soon had, first a smoke, then a blaze. Not long after this, he was turning a carefully picked and cleaned fowl over a cheerful flame.

Having broiled this to a turn, he shared it with the dog, then lay down to sleep. Before the sweet oblivion of sleep quieted his aching muscles, the old haunting questions came back to him, "What land? What people?" There were but two questions now; the third had been temporarily solved; they still had a bird for breakfast, and that there were others to be caught he did not doubt.

CHAPTER XVII

OUT OF THE NIGHT

After Marian and Lucile had heard the crash against the door of the boarded-up house, and had stilled their wildly beating hearts, they dragged themselves halfway out of their sleeping-bags and sat up.

"What was it?" Marian repeated. Her teeth were chattering so she could hardly whisper.

"It saw the light from the seal-oil lamp," Lucile whispered. A cold chill ran up her back. "Sh! Listen!"

It was a tense moment. A dead silence hovered over the room. Had they heard a sound as of low moaning or whining, or was it the wind?

"Marian," whispered Lucile, "what sort of a sound does a polar bear make?"

"I don't know," Marian shivered.

"Whatever it is, we're not going to open that door."

"I — I don't know." The moan came distinctly now, and a scratching sound. "Perhaps we ought. Perhaps — perhaps it is some one in trouble."

Lucile was silent; she had not thought of that.

For five minutes they sat there listening. Not a word passed between them. Now and again there came that awful, low moan and the scratching. Save for the dismal wail of the wind that had arisen and was singing about the corners of the house there was no other sound. The seal-oil lamp in the corner flickered constantly, sending a weird yellow light dancing from floor to ceiling.

"Lucile," said Marian at last, "I can't stand it any longer. If it's someone in distress, they'll surely freeze, and then we could never forgive ourselves. The chain will let the door open a crack. If it's a bear, or a wolf, or a wild dog, he can't break the chain. If it's someone, whoever he is, even if he's drunk, we ought to help him."

Lucile shivered, but she arose and, fumbling about, found the butcher knife.

"I'll stand by with the knife." She followed Marian, as they tiptoed toward the door.

The moon was shining brightly through the window. Whatever was at the door, they would be able to see it once the door was open a crack.

"Now! Ready!" whispered Marian, as she grasped the doorknob and turned it.

With a wildly beating heart Lucile waited at her side.

But the door did not open. "It's stuck," whispered Marian. "I — I guess you'll have to help me."

Reluctantly laying down the knife, Lucile put both hands over Marian's and exerted all her strength in a pull.

The next instant the door gave way, but instead of being permanently held by the chain, it was only momentarily checked by it, then flew wide open, sending both girls crashing to the floor. The rusty staple had broken.

Too frightened to breathe they scrambled to

their feet. Lucile fumbled about for the knife. Marian seized the door to close it. Then in one breath they exclaimed, "Why, it's only an Eskimo boy!"

It was true. Before them on the snow, peering white-faced at them, was a native boy, probably not over ten years old.

He dragged himself to a sitting position, then attempted to rise. At this he failed, and fell over again.

"He must be injured," said Marian.

"Or starved," answered Lucile.

It was plain that the boy was at this time quite as much frightened as had been the girls a moment before.

"We must get him inside and find out if he is hurt," said Lucile, bending over and grasping the boy by the shoulder. As she did this he uttered a low moan of fear and shrank back.

Disregarding this, the two girls lifted him gently, and, carrying him inside, set him on their sleeping-bag with the wall of the room as a prop to his back.

"I believe his foot's hurt," said Lucile suddenly. "See how his skin-boot is torn!"

To cut away the boot, which was stiff and frozen, was a delicate task. When this and the deerskin sock had been removed, they saw that the foot had indeed been badly crushed. The deerskin sock had prevented it from freezing.

By carefully pressing and working it this way and that, Lucile determined that there were probably no bones broken. It, however, was swelling rapidly.

"We must bandage it at once," said Lucile.

"With what?"

Lucile's answer was to tear a six-inch strip from the bottom of her underskirt. The wound was then tightly and skillfully bandaged.

"Next thing's something to eat," said Lucile, rising. "You stay here and I'll see what I can find to cook something in."

She soon returned with a huge brass teakettle of the Russian type. Into this she put snow, and hung it over the seal-oil lamp. Soon a bit of fish was boiling.

"Better warm stuff at first," she explained. "He must be nearly frozen."

All this time the boy, with his look of fear gone, sat staring at them, his big brown eyes full of wonder.

"I'd like to know where he came from and how it is that he's alone," said Marian.

"So would I," said Lucile. "Well, anyway, we'll have to do the best we can for him. You know what it says somewhere about 'entertaining angels.'"

"Yes, and that reminds me. He must have a place to sleep. I'll go see what I can find."

She returned presently with an arm-load of deerskins.

"There's everything out there," she smiled, nodding toward the native village; "just as if they were gone overnight and would be back in the morning."

"I wonder," said Marian, with a little thrill, "if they will."

An hour later, with a pole propped solidly against the door, with the boy slumbering sound-

ly in the opposite corner, and the seal-oil lamp flickering low, the girls once more gave themselves over to sleep.

When they awoke, they found the cabin encircled by a howling whirlwind of snow, one of those wild storms that come up so suddenly in Arctic seas and as suddenly subside.

The frozen fish, which was a large one, sufficed for both breakfast and dinner for the three of them. The boy, a bright little fellow, with the ruddy brown cheeks of an Italian peasant boy, but with the slight squint of eyes and flatness of nose peculiar to these natives of the North, watched every move they made with great interest.

They tried from time to time, to talk to him, but he did not, apparently, know a word of English, and even to the few words of Eskimo they knew he gave no response.

"Oh, Lucile!" Marian exclaimed at last. "Are we in Russia or America? Who is this boy? Where are his people?"

Lucile did not reply. She was too deeply per-

plexed for words. But the boy, seeming to have caught something of the purport of Marian's words, tore a splinter from the board wall of the cabin, and, having held it in the blaze of the seal-oil lamp until it was charred, began to draw on the floor.

First he drew a large circle, then a small one. Next, on the large circle he drew lines to represent men, as children often do, a straight line for the back and one each for an arm and a leg, with a circle for a head. When he had drawn many of these, he drew a square within the smaller circle, and within the square drew two characters to represent persons. He next drew, between the two circles, many irregular figures. In the midst of this mass of irregular figures he drew a character for a person.

He made a motion with his hand to indicate that the irregular figures between the circles were in motion. Next he made a motion with his charcoal pencil to indicate that the lone person was moving across the irregular figures between the circles. This motion was halting, as

if the person, many times, stumbled and fell. The course of the charcoal at last reached the edge of the square, and there it drew the reclining figure of a person.

Lucile had watched every move intently.

"Do you see what he is telling us?" she cried excitedly. "It is the old native way of telling stories by drawings. He has said, by the two circles, that there are two islands, one large, one small. On the large one are many people — his people — on the small one, a house — the house we are in. Between the two islands there is floeing ice. A figure is attempting to cross the ice. He is that one. He falls many times, but at last reaches the island and this house."

"And," said Marian, "probably the people, many of them, live on this island. They were probably over there when the ice came. They did not dare to attempt to cross. When the floe is steady and solid, as it will be after this storm, then they will cross. And then —" she paused.

"Yes, and then?" said Lucile, huskily.

With the setting of the sun, the wind fell. The snow-fog drifted away and the moon came out. Lucile crept out of the cabin and went in search of some new form of food. She found the spare-ribs of a seal hanging over a pole on one of the caches. It seemed fairly fresh, and when a piece was set simmering over the seal-oil lamp it gave forth an appetizing odor.

The two girls stood by the window as the food cooked. They were looking out over the sea, which was now a solid mass of ice.

"I almost believe I can catch the faint outline of that other island," said Lucile.

"Yes, I think you can," said Marian. "But what was that?" She gripped her companion's arm.

"What?" said Lucile.

"I — thought — yes, there it is; out there to the right. Some dark object moving among the ice-cakes."

"Yes, now I see it. And there's another and another. Yes, perhaps twenty or more. What can they be?"

"Men — and — dogs," said Marian, slowly. "The tribe is coming home." There was a little catch in her voice. Every muscle in her body was tense. They were far from their homes, not knowing where they were; and these people, a strange, perhaps wild, tribe of savages.

Then there came to Marian the words of the great bishop: "Humanity is very much the same everywhere," and for a time the thought comforted her.

They remained there standing in full view in the moonlight, watching until the men could be distinguished from the dogs; until the whole company, some fifty or more people, left the ice and began to climb the slope that led to the village.

But now they all stopped. They were pointing at the cabin, some of them gesticulating wildly.

After a time they came on again, but this time much more slowly. In their lead was a wild-haired man, who constantly went through the weird dance motions of these native tribes;

weird, wild calisthenics they were, a thrusting out of both hands on this side, then that, a bowing, bending backward, leaping high in air. And now they caught the sound of the witch song they were all chanting:

"I — I — am — ah! ah! ah!
I — I — I ah! ah! ah!"

As they neared the cabin Lucile turned away.

"I — I think," she said unsteadily, "we had better bar the door."

At that she lifted the heavy bar and propped it against the door.

CHAPTER XVIII

A NEW PERIL

Long hours in the cranny of the cliff Phi was wrapped in heavy slumber. Dressed as he was in deerskin and sealskin garments, he did not feel the cold. The bed was soft, his "house" well sheltered from the wind.

He awoke at last to start and stare. The sun was painting the peaks of distant ice-piles with a touch of pink and gold. He experienced a strange sensation. For one brief moment he fancied himself on the mainland of Alaska. This, he realized, was not entirely impossible; the ice-floe might have circled about to carry him near to the coast again.

So possessed was he with the idea that he grew impatient at the slow broiling of their one remaining bird. Once the meal was over, having hidden the bird net in the crevice, that he might return to it in case of necessity, he hur-

ried away. With Rover at his heels, he crossed the uneven surface of the plateau, keeping well toward the edge of the rocky cliff that he might discover a path, if there should be one, leading down to a village or a miner's cabin.

In his mind's eye he pictured himself sitting down to a meal of "mulligan" and sour-dough flapjack in some friend's mining shack, and, if this dream came true, how quickly he would shape his course toward the spot he had been directed to by the ciphered note in the blue envelope!

"I'd walk in on them like old Rip Van Winkle." He smiled and glanced at his dog.

"You look the part of Rip's dog, old fellow," he laughed; "you surely do."

Yet, as he thought more soberly, he realized that there was really no reason for supposing that the ice-floe had returned him to the mainland of America.

"Might be a point of the mainland of Asia," he reasoned. "The people who come here hunting may be Chukches."

Had his mind been less occupied with these speculations he might have taken note of some movement off to the right of him. As it was, he walked straight on.

Suddenly a small, dark object flew past his head. Before he could turn to investigate, a second, better aimed, struck him in the side. Caught off his balance, he went crashing to the ground. The next moment the dog gave a yelp of pain. He too had been struck by one of these flying missiles which proved to be rocks.

Stunned, but not seriously injured, Phi rose upon hands and knees and made all haste to fortify himself behind a massive bowlder. Growling defiance, the old dog crouched by his side.

It was a moment of suspense. What could this mean? Into the boy's mind there crowded many questions. Had he been carried to the shore of some island of the far north where the white man had never set foot? Was he about to be attacked by a murderous band of super-

stitious natives? He had seen no one. How many were there and why did they use only stones for weapons? The bow and arrow are known to the most ignorant savage.

To these questions he could form no answer. He could only crouch there and wait.

He did not have long to consider what his next move should be, for a rock grazed his ear. A quick glance in the direction from whence it came showed him the form of a single native. Instantly the man vanished, but a moment later a second rock flew through the air. It came from exactly the same spot.

"May be only one," he murmured.

Encouraged by this thought, he proceeded to stalk his enemy by hurrying around the bowlder and peering out at him from the other end.

The ruse worked. He found the man standing in full view, craning his neck to look around the side of the rock which the boy had just left.

Presently the native took a few steps forward. Phi thought he walked with a kind of stagger.

"It's strange he'd have the courage to attack

me alone, armed only with rocks," he murmured.

A yelp from the old dog roused him to action. The native's rock had found a mark. His back was turned to the boy and with a sudden, swift rush Phi leaped out and landed full upon his back. The two of them went crashing to earth.

For a moment the man struggled with almost demoniacal strength, then suddenly he crumpled in the boy's grasp and sank lifeless to the ground.

Fearing a trick Phi turned the man over and sat upon his chest, pinning his hands to the ground. But he was unconscious; there was no mistaking that.

"That's queer," perplexedly. "I didn't do anything to him that I know of. Wasn't thrown hard or anything."

He bent over to gather up a handful of snow with which to rub the native's brow, when he caught an old, familiar odor.

Just then the dog came limping up. "Rover, old boy," Phi smiled a queer sort of smile, "we're not beyond the reaches of the civilized

white man. This fellow's drunk. Hooch. In other words, moonshine; I smell it on his breath. That's why he was throwing stones at us. Crazy drunk, that's all. Now he's gone dead on us, like a flivver run out of gas."

The dog smelled of the man and growled.

"Don't like it, do you? Most honest men and dogs don't. Moonshine's no good for anybody. And now, just for that, we're in for something of a task. This fellow'd lie here until he froze stiff as a mastodon tusk if we'd let him, but we can't afford to let him, even if he did pelt us with rocks. We've got to get him on his feet somehow and make him 'walk the dog' till he sweats some of that hooch out of him."

As he looked the man over for a knife which might prove dangerous once he was roused from his stupor, Phi realized that he was not on the mainland of America. This man's costume was quite unlike that of the Diomeders. He wore a shirt of eiderduck skins such as was never seen on the Little Diomede, and his outer gar-

ments of short-haired deerskin, instead of being composed of parka and trousers were all of one piece.

"Wherever we are," he said to the dog, "we'll know what's what in an hour or two."

* * * * * * *

After witnessing the strange actions of the group of natives as they clustered in about the boarded-up house, with wildly beating hearts Lucile and Marian took their places back a little in the shadows, where they could not be seen but could still watch the wild antics of their strange visitors.

"What does it mean?" whispered Marian.

"I can't even guess," Lucile whispered back. "Something terrible though, I am sure."

By this time the entire group were circling the house, and their wild shrill cadent song rose high and loud:

"Ki — yi — yi — um — Ah! Ah! Ah! I — I — I!"

The single dancer tore his hair again and again, and repeated his mad gesticulations.

Only one figure stood back impassive — not singing and not taking any part in the weird demonstration.

Suddenly, at a sign from the wild-haired leader, all the singing ceased. He uttered a few words apparently of command, then waved his scrawny arms toward the house.

A wild shout rent the air. All the natives, save the impassive one, sprang to their feet and started toward their village. But now the impassive one leaped up and tried to check them, to drive them back. As well attempt to stop a torrent with the open hand. They pushed him aside and hurried on.

The next moment the girls heard a pounding at the door, but dared not open it.

"What does it mean? What *can* it mean?" They kept asking one another.

Presently the mad group came racing back. Some bore on their shoulders poles and boards hastily torn from their caches. Two others were staggering under a load which appeared to be a sealskin filled with some liquid.

"Seal-oil!" said Lucile. "What—" and then the full meaning of it came to her like a flash. "Marian!" she said in an almost inaudible whisper, "they mean to burn the cabin. That's what the wood and oil are for—to start the fire!"

The words were hardly out of her mouth when Marian gripped her arm. "Look!" she cried.

A dense black smoke was rolling past the window.

Roused by her cry, the crippled Eskimo boy sprang upon his one well foot and came hopping toward them.

One look at the smoke, at the madly dancing old man, and he hopped for the door. Throwing the pole to the floor, he hopped outside and away.

"He's gone! Deserted us!"

"What does it matter now?" Lucile covered her face with her hands.

"But look!" cried Marian.

The boy had hopped out into the howling,

dancing circle. The howling had ceased. He had tumbled to a sitting position on the snow, but was speaking and motioning with his hands. Once he pointed at his bandaged foot. Twice he put his hands to his mouth, as if to mimic eating. Then he sprang nimbly upon his one foot and would have leaped toward the now raging fire, but the one who had been first impassive, then had attempted to restrain the mad throng, restrained him, for the others, leaping at the fire, threw it hither and yon, stamping out with their feet the blaze that had already begun eating its way into the building.

It was all over in a minute. Then the two girls sank down upon the floor, dizzy and sick, wondering what it was all about.

* * * * * * *

Phi found that to rouse the native from his drunken stupor was no easy task. After rubbing the man's forehead with snow, he stood him on his feet and attempted to compel him to walk. Finding this impossible, he worked his arms back and forth, producing artificial respiration.

At last his efforts were rewarded; the man opened his eyes and stared dully up at him. For some time he lay there motionless. Then, with a wild light of terror in his eye, he struggled to his feet and attempted to flee. His wabbly legs would not support him. He tumbled to the earth, only to try it again. Rover ran barking after him.

"Let him alone," smiled Phi. "As long as he is not in danger of harming himself, let him work. He's doing as much as we could do for him. He'll work it out of his system."

In spite of his muddled state the fellow appeared to possess a sense of direction, for the boy soon found that he had come upon a narrow path leading along the cliff at a safe distance from its edge.

As he stumbled forward, the native's falls became less frequent. "Sobering up," was Phi's mental comment. "We'll soon strike a place where the path leads down the side of the cliff. I wonder if he can make that alone or will he break his neck?"

Suddenly the man disappeared from view. "That," said Phi to the dog, "means there's a path leading directly down, probably to some village. If it is a village there are natives there — perhaps hundreds of them. They have seen white men at one time or another. They may have been badly treated by them and may be hostile to them. If one were to judge by the action of this fellow he must conclude that they are.

"But that cannot influence our action in any way. If we stay up here and live on birds they'll find us sooner or later. Might as well go down; the quicker the better, too, for this drunken fellow will doubtless give a weird and terrible account of us."

At that he raced along the cliff-top path and the next moment found himself slipping and sliding down a zig-zagging trail which led down the hillside.

He was halfway down before he caught the first glimpse of the village. Beneath him lay some brown cubes which he knew to be boxlike

upper stories to the houses of the natives.

"That settles one thing," he murmured. "They're islanders. The natives of Russia build their homes of poles, deerskin and walrus-skin, tepee fashion; the American natives use logs and sod. Only islanders build them of rocks."

For a moment his courage failed him. He was a boy on an island somewhere in the Arctic, his only companion an old and harmless dog, his only weapon a hunting knife; and he was about to enter a village filled with natives.

"Perhaps," he said slowly, looking down into the trusting eyes of the dog, "we had better wait. They may all be on a grand spree. And if they are it won't be safe. Whatever they may be when they're sober, they'll be dangerous enough when drunk."

But the peaceful quiet of the village, as it lay there some hundreds of feet below, reassured him.

"Come on, old boy," he said at last, "we'll chance it."

CHAPTER XIX

MYSTERIES EXPLAINED

There was little time left to the girls for wondering after the fire against the boarded-up house had been extinguished, for the entire throng burst in upon them. This time, apparently as eager to welcome them as they had been a few minutes before to destroy them, they rushed up to grasp their hands and mumble:

"Me-con-a-muck! Il-e-con-a-muck!"

Soon they all filed out again, two of them bearing the boy with the crushed foot.

Only one remained. He was a young Eskimo with a clean-cut intelligent face. Lucile, by his posture, recognized the one who had championed their cause from the first.

"Perhaps you wonder much?" he began. "Perhaps you ask how is this? Sit down. I will say it to you."

The very sound of their own tongue, badly managed though it might be, was music to the two worn out and nerve-wrecked girls. They sat down on the sleeping-bag to listen, while the yellow light of the seal-oil lamp flickered across the dark, expressive face of the Eskimo.

He bent over and drew imaginary circles on the floor, one small and one large, just as the boy had done with charcoal.

"Here," he smiled, "one island. Here one. This island one house. Here —"

"Where is this island?" broke in Lucile, too eager to know their position on the shore of the Arctic to hear him through.

"Yes," he smiled, "this island is here, very small. This one is here, very large." Again the imaginary circles were drawn.

Lucile smiled and was silent.

"This one large island," the native went on, "this one plenty Eskimo. Come to visit some Eskimo. Some live here, these Eskimo.

"Pretty soon come big ice-floe. Wanna cross, these people. Can't. Wanna cross, one boy.

Try cross. Broke foot. You see. Come house. Fell down. Think die, that boy. Wanna come in. Pretty soon, open door, white women, you. See white women; scared, that boy, too much scared. Wanna run, that boy. Can't. Pretty soon see white woman good, kind, that one boy. Plenty fix up foot. Plenty eat, that boy. Wanna stay.

"Pretty soon come plenty wind; plenty ice. Wanna cross ice all time, those Eskimo. Now can cross. Cross plenty Eskimo, plenty dog-team. Come this island, one little island. See?"

"Where is this island?" Lucile broke in again.

"Yes," the speaker smiled frankly, "one big island, one little island. Wanna cross people. All cross people."

Again Lucile was silent.

"Pretty soon," he resumed, "see light in Alongmeet's (white man's) house. Wanna know who come island. Look. See two white face in window; two white women. Then pretty much scared. One witch-doctor, old man, hair all so,"

he rubbed up his hair. "Say that witch-doctor, 'No come white women this island; too much ice, no come. Spirits come; that's all.' Say that one witch-doctor, 'Must kill white woman spirits; must burn house. Wanna burn house quick.'

"I say, 'No burn; no spirits mebbe. White women mebbe.'

"He say, that witch-doctor, he say, 'No white woman, white spirit, that's all.' All people say, 'Spirit! Spirit! Burn! Burn!' All wanna burn.

"Me, I wanna stop burn. No can do. Wanna burn. Bring wood, bring oil, all that Eskimo. Pretty soon fire. Wanna come in mine. No can do.

"By and by come that one boy, rush outa cabin; wanna tell no burn house. No spirit; white woman, that's all. No burn. He say, that boy, 'No burn. See white woman eat fish. Spirits no eat fish.'

"Then all the people say quick, 'No burn! No burn!' So no burn. See? That's all."

The Eskimo smiled frankly, as he mopped the perspiration from his brow.

"They wanted to burn us because they thought we were spirits," Lucile said slowly; then suddenly, "What do they call this island?"

"This? This one island?" The Eskimo pointed to the floor.

"Yes." The girls learned forward eagerly.

"This one white man call 'Little Diomede.'"

The two girls stared at one another for a moment. Then they laughed. In the laugh there was both surprise and great joy. They were surprised that in all the drifting of their ice-floe they had been carried about in a circle, and at last landed only twenty-two miles across-ocean from their home, on Little Diomede Island, the halfway station between the mainland of America and Russia.

"We live at Cape Prince of Wales," said Lucile. "How can we go home?"

The Eskimo merely shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"Whose is this house?" asked Marian.

"Government," the Eskimo replied. "Schoolhouse one time. Not now. Not many children. I — I teach 'em a little, mine. Teach 'em in native house, mine."

So there the mystery was solved. They were in a schoolhouse built by the United States Government, but which was not now being used. The natives, always very superstitious, having seen their faces through the window, and not believing it possible that any white persons could come to the island at such a time, had, at the suggestion of the old witch-doctor, resolved to burn the house in the hopes of driving the spirits away. When the lame boy had limped into their midst, and had told how his wound had been dressed by these white women, and how he had seen them eat fish, which no spirit can do, according to the superstition of the Eskimo, they had been quite ready to put out the fire and welcome the strangers, all the more so since the girls had been kind to one in distress.

Phi's experience in the village of the island upon which he had been cast was more happy

than he could have dreamed of. It turned out that the native who had attacked him was the only drunken person on the island. That it was an island, the Big Diomede, he was immediately informed by a young native who had learned English on a whaler.

So it turned out that the two parties, Lucile and Marian and Phi and Rover, had been carried about on the ice-floe for three days at last to be landed on twin islands.

Phi's first thought was for the safety of his former traveling companions. When he learned that nothing had been seen of them on the Big Diomede, without pausing to rest he pushed on across the now solidly frozen mass of ice which silenced the two miles of ocean which, in summer, sweeps between the two islands.

It was night when he arrived, the night of the strange witch-doctor's seance. This had all come to an end. The schoolhouse was dark — the girls were asleep. From a prowling native he learned that the girls were there and safe, then he turned in for a long sleep.

Next day, much to the surprise and delight of the girls, he walked in upon them as they were at breakfast.

When the story of all their strange adventures had been told Phi drew from his pocket a much soiled blue envelope.

Phi first told how he had finally come into possession of the letter, then he went on:

"I — I guess I may as well tell you about it. It's really no great mystery, no great story of the discovery of gold. Just the locating of a bit of whalebone.

"You see, my uncle came to the North with two thousand dollars. He stayed three years. Then the money was gone and he had found no gold. That happens often, I'm told. Then, one day he came upon the carcass of an immense bowhead whale far north on the Alaskan shore. It had been washed ashore by a storm. No natives lived near. The bone of that whale was worth a small fortune. He cut it out and buried it in the sand dunes near the beach. So eager was he to make good at last that he actually

lived on the gristly flesh of that whale until the work was done. Then he went south in search of a gasoline schooner to bring the treasure away. It was worth four or five thousand dollars. But he had made himself sick. He was brought home from Nome delirious. From his ravings his son, my cousin, gathered some notion of a treasure hid away in Alaska. The doctor said he would recover in time. His family was in need of money. I offered to come up here and find out what I could. His son was to write me any information he could obtain. We had written one another letters in Greek while in college. We decided to do it in this case, addressing one another as Phi Beta Ki.

"Apparently my uncle had said too much in his delirium before he left Nome. This crooked old miner, our bearded friend, heard it, and later, somehow, got on my trail.

"You know the rest, except that this letter gives the location of the whalebone. In the spring I shall go after it."

As he finished, a great, glad feeling of content

swept over Marian; she had been right, had made no mistake; the letter was really Phi's. Now he had it and all was well.

The following day they succeeded in finding a competent guide to pilot them the remaining distance across the Straits, and in due time they arrived safely at the cabin which had been their home.

Lucile found a new teacher in her position, but for that she did not care, as she had already decided to spend a month with Marian in Nome, then take the overland trail home.

Marian's sketches were received with great enthusiasm by the Society of Ethnology. Because of her extra efforts in securing the unusual pictures of the Reindeer Chukches, they added a thousand dollars to the agreed price.

Phi's search for the buried treasure was successful, and to him was given the unselfish joy of seeing his uncle, now completely restored to health, comfortably set up in a snug little business of his own.

The Blue Envelope

Snell

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